
ICAV Perspective Paper

Intercountry & Transracial Adoptee Experiences

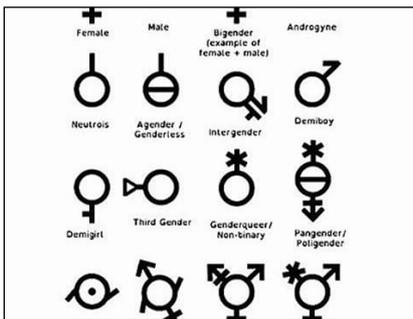


Inter Country Adoptee Voices

Introduction

Over the years, ICAV has provided many resources from those who live the journey to demonstrate that the path is life-long, to finding and understanding our multiple “cultural” and “racial” identities. We are adopted from one country to another and it cannot be assumed our adoptive families or countries, mirror us in our biology. It makes sense then, that our journey becomes further compounded if our “gender” identity and sexual orientation are also not mirrored, accepted, or supported in our adoptive families, communities, and countries.

In my years of meeting many intercountry adoptees, I’ve noticed a gradual “awakening” of those who identify with being members of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Others (LGBTQ+) community. Not having these identities myself, I became curious to understand these additional layers for those who are confronted with, and end up questioning and exploring, their gender identity and sexual orientation. I wanted to understand how I could better support my fellow adoptees, who are discovering these other multiple layers, as additional to the usual cultural and racial identities faced by intercountry adoptees.



My aims for this paper were to raise awareness of what these journey’s to explore gender identity and sexual orientation involve for intercountry adoptees. I also observe little has been written in intercountry adoption literature to investigate this topic. I wondered if the sense of isolation felt amongst adoptees in general, is further compounded for adoptees who identify with the LGBTQ+ community and if so, we need to consider the additional mental health impacts this can have. Lastly, I wanted this paper to shed some light on how we, as a community of people impacted by intercountry adoption, can better support our fellow adoptees as they navigate finding their additional identities and orientations.

Whilst compiling this paper, I was reminded of how non adopted people take for granted what “identity” means. Those who have it, can dismiss it’s significance, whereas adopted people like myself know it is not something everybody has. Our journey to unravel our identity is lifelong and complex. I now realise that one’s sexual orientation and gender identity should also never be taken for granted. We need to recognise it is another facet of

“identity” that needs to be explored, validated, and accepted in the intercountry adoption community in general.

There is nothing more powerful than hearing it from those who live it, to give us the knowledge and insight as to what it’s like. I want to sincerely thank the 18 contributors who give their life experiences to us with openness, honesty, and truth. In reading this paper, I hope we can all learn, and do more, to be open, supportive and compassionate to our fellow human beings.

Lynelle Long

Founder
InterCountry Adoptee Voices (ICAV)
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Inter Country Adoptee Voices



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An-Jiao

I am born in Nanning, Guangxi, China and adopted to the USA at eleven months of age to white middle class parents who do not have other children. My first female crush was during fifth grade but I didn't consider myself LGBTQ+ until sixth grade. Being bisexual was pretty much fine and normal within my friend group. My parents found out when I was in seventh grade and were disapproving.

My father handles my sexuality better than my mother. My father will sometimes ask why I can't just marry a man. My mother ignores my sexuality for the most part. Both ignore gender.

I generally avoid LGBTQ+ spaces because they tend to be more left wing than I. In those spaces my opinion about LGBTQ+ things can sometimes seem more conservative than others and this causes me to feel uncomfortable. As a result, I prefer to emphasise and remain active in the Asian-American community rather than the LGBTQ+ space. While I am comfortable being nonbinary and bisexual, it's not as large a part of my identity as other things. That's why I tend to ignore it when people who are not close to me, use the wrong pronouns. I pass as cishet. For me, it's not my job to correct people's assumptions. It's on them for assuming things.



It's hard to find a female partner because I don't know who is or isn't straight. On the other hand, most males I come in contact with, are straight. In terms of dating, it's hard finding someone comfortable with "they/them" pronouns. Aesthetically I prefer anyone that is ethnically from the continent of Asia - east, south east, south west - it doesn't matter. However, Asians can be more traditional. Of course when dating, for me it is about choosing who I click with. Race doesn't affect who I date as much but it affects who I hook up with. For example, I find the average Asian male much more attractive than the average white male. For me, my identity within the LGBTQ+ community is not necessarily something I am very vocal about. If someone asks, I don't mind saying my sexuality or pronouns but unless they are close friends, I don't bother. It's personal and not their business.

I haven't put a lot of effort into finding any biological family. Learning that I'm probably half Filipino means it was most likely an unplanned pregnancy out of wedlock. Also my

search would be hard because I'm split between countries. Should I find bio family, I will not mention I am LGBTQ+ because China is very conservative.

Being LGBTQ+ has not impacted my identity and actions as much as being an Asian adoptee has. As an Asian adoptee and only child who came from a slightly troubled family, I am constantly wanting to build and find my own self formed family. I often look towards other Asians for this, rather than within the LGBTQ+ community. However, as I do not have many positive older LGBTQ+ role models, I would like to have a few in order to help me feel comfortable with my own identity and in my place in the community. Being bisexual, I have the "possibility" to live life as a "heterosexual". Every time I see or find an older lesbian couple, it makes it more clear to me that I can also end up with a female partner and helps show me what that might look like.

Christof (Cristóbal)



Whiteness and racism in the queer community: A queer adoptee of colour perspective

Living as a male queer adoptee of colour in the White West is often challenging. Race and ethnicity play a significant role in our postcolonial societies and are highly intertwined with power inequalities and discrimination in the disadvantage of people of colour. Numerous studies have documented structural racism in education, in the labour market, in the rental market and in other domains of our society. However, racism also infiltrates into the most intimate spheres of our non-white lives. As a male queer adoptee of colour, I would like to elaborate in this essay on how race and ethnicity impacts the queer (adoptee) of colour experience.

Raised white

Let me briefly introduce myself: I am a twenty five year old Bolivian adoptee and was raised together with my younger adopted sister from China by white adoptive parents in Flanders, Belgium. We lived in a small white town where everybody knew my sister and I. As children, we were constantly surrounded by white people, as friends, family, neighbours, teachers, and so on. We did not have a problem with this because it felt so “natural”. By living in this sea of whiteness I often forgot my own skin colour.

As a teenager I became more aware of my racial difference and of my sexual orientation. At that moment I knew the norm in this society was to be white, male and heterosexual, while I was not white nor heterosexual. I felt odd and alone in my existence. This feeling I

carried for a very long time with me. It is until recently I have been more in contact with other queer (adoptee) friends of colour with whom I can share these experiences.

White as an ideal image

As adoptees of colour, raised in white families, neighbourhoods and schools, we are trained to desire whiteness. It affects us in every aspect of our life. Many of us have even developed the desire to become white, identify as white or have exclusively white partners and friends. Even in the queer community whiteness is highly prevalent. To give an example: the white middle class gay man has become the embodiment of homosexuality today. He has taken a central place in numerous TV series, talk shows, movies, commercials, posters, campaigns and so on. Consequently, people in all their racial, cultural, sexual and gender identities are simply forgotten, ignored and put aside. It is as if they do not matter to the broader queer community.

Simultaneously, our society teaches us whiteness and masculinity are the symbol of excellence. Unfortunately, the queer world reconfirms and reproduces this dominant image, resulting in a great lack of representation of diversity that is present within the queer community. This stimulates white and non-white queers to strive for this white image, embody it and even have an almost exclusive preference for it. As a result, white queer men are at the top of the racial hierarchy in this white-dominated queer world. Interracial relationships are highly present in queer and adoptee communities: I have seen many queer people of colour and adoptees of colour date exclusively white people. However, it has been rarely questioned, investigated or discussed.

Racist preferences

It should be no surprise we queer people of colour face many forms of racism and racialisation within the queer community. Queer and trans people of colour are often considered less attractive because of their skin colour, their specific body characteristics, their cultural background, their religion, and all kinds of other prejudices. This is made clear to them, ranging from very explicit to rather subtle, during interactions with both white and non-white queers. Excluding someone based on solely their race is nothing else than blatant racism, disguised in the form of "having a racial preference".

On the other hand, queer and trans people of colour are sometimes preferred and desired because of their "exotic" background and the paired erotic fantasies about the sexual Other. It is like our personalities do not matter anymore. There have been created many expectations purely on the basis of the ethnic-cultural background that is ascribed to us. Our non-white bodies are reduced to a fetish, to an "exotic" experience or something that can be checked off from the country list. White men who approach me often openly express their racial preference, followed by "[insert ethnicity] are [fill in racial prejudice]." This sexual racism is problematic, colonial and must stop.

A white haven

Both online and offline queer and trans people of colour are confronted with these racial prejudices. To such an extent, that some of us keep the white boat completely off. What should be a safe haven for queer and trans people regardless of their religion, 'race', ethnicity and culture, has become a white haven in which whiteness and masculinity prevail.

This problem is not exclusively present within the queer community. It is part of a bigger problem in our society. Because the voices of people of colour have been largely ignored, we create our own organisations, our own actions and our own safe havens. Hereby we can place our ideas central and we are no longer a side figure within the dominant narrative. This is also the case with queer and trans people of colour: we create our own spaces and groups of friends where we can be ourselves in all our differences.

However, most queer adoptees of colour I know personally don't have any problems with these white havens. Many of them don't even see the symbolic violence of whiteness that is persistent in these white queer communities. Further, I consider the adoptee community also as a safe haven for queer adoptees of colour. Upon today I have never experienced any homophobia at adoptee gatherings and always felt very welcome. Although whiteness is highly present among adoptee communities, at least in Flanders.

Forgotten histories

When we take the history of freedom movements into account, we see that queer and trans people of colour have played an indispensable position in this. For example, in the past, some trans women of colour played a prominent role in the Stonewall riots. More recently, a few years ago, the world-famous "Black Lives Matter" movement was founded by three queer women of colour. I am convinced there are many other examples where queer and trans people of colour have played a significant role in (queer) activism. However, these histories are little known to the wider public.

The lack of visibility of queer and trans people of colour in the struggle for equal rights reproduces the dominant image that white queer persons are seen as the "heroes" who fight for LGBTQ+ rights, both in Belgium and elsewhere in the world. Especially when these white Western movements speak out about homophobia and equal rights in non-Western countries, the colonial undertone becomes painfully clear.

Even within our adoptee movements it is important to recognise how diverse our community is and how this shapes the adoptee experience. Queer, trans and disabled adoptees of colour do exist in our communities. They might be less visible, but we should not forget to include them.

Final thoughts

I cannot speak for all queer people of colour, nor for queer adoptees of colour. Everyone's experience is different and unique. I also want to emphasise that whiteness is not exclusively connected to having a white skin colour: it is an ideology that has been internalised by both white and non-white people.

Being a queer adoptee of colour is often challenging. I look quite critical towards the white gays who are mimicking heteronormativity. Simultaneously I do the same with adoptees of colour who are mimicking whiteness. However, I have found my online and offline communities where I do feel "home". We empower each other, share experiences and create our own safe spaces where our queerness and racial/ cultural differences can be celebrated.

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Danny

I was adopted from Hong Kong to the United States when I was 7 months old. I was fortunate enough to be adopted into a very loving family who understood all the dynamics I would face growing up: a dad who immigrated from Hong Kong himself when he was 8 years old, and a mother who lived in the “Five Towns” her entire life. I also have an adopted sister, not biologically related, who was born in Gaoming, China. Both of my parents were raised Catholic and thus my sister and I were too, though the interpretations of the Bible we utilised as a family were very open.

From the time I started pre-Kindy, I knew I was different from the rest of my classmates. I never fitted within the binary stereotypes that were rampant during the time. Surprisingly, this included state-wide physical fitness testing in school. For the age group I was bracketed into, my results fell within the girls’ “Healthy Fitness Zone”. This meant I was considered “healthy”, especially with regards to flexibility, and something I still cherish.

Being unique meant I was always an easy target. When I was young, the bullying started because I was so feminine and never ashamed to show it. In retrospect, I am proud to say I never once ever thought, “What is wrong with me?” but rather, “Why don’t they accept me for me?” That is a mindset my parents instilled in my sister and I because they always showed what was great about us, rather than finding or fixating on the flaws. Eventually, my fellow classmates grew tired of me not caring about sexuality comments and moved towards commentary about being adopted.

Being adopted was never a secret within my house. I was told I was adopted from an extremely young age. I never understood how adoption could be a secret within families like mine. I clearly remember adopting my sister and my mother not being pregnant. My parents had also ensured my sister and I were a part of an adoptee community from a young age. We knew dozens of other adopted kids in our small section of New York who were just like us. Therefore, being singled out for being adopted was a moot point to my 5 year old mind.

For anyone who is being harassed within schools, I highly recommend transparency. Being open and visible really helped people witness my experiences. It changed mindsets



and made the necessary disciplinary actions swift and easy. This is what inspired me to be a professional school counsellor. Being an example for someone else and being a witness to others' experiences is something I find very fulfilling.

Strangely enough, I did not see myself as a gay human until ninth grade of high school. One day, a boy walked into algebra class and my world stopped as I admired him with his new haircut. In that moment, I happily accepted who I was but I was angry at the world labelling me before I did. No-one likes to admit they're wrong. By the end of the school day, I had "come out" to no one's surprise. For a while, most of the world's commentary about it had stopped. Their issue was with my "denial", not who I was. I came out when I knew. My life, my narrative.

The biggest hiccup with my sexuality came from my birth family. My birth mother was sixteen years old when I was born and she gave me up for a chance of a better life in the United States. Through the adoption agency, we maintained contact by sending Christmas cards and letters back and forth until I was in high school.

Facebook was booming when I was in high school and I decided to search for my birth family given I knew their names. They accepted my friend requests and I finally met my grandparents and uncles. Though there is a strong language barrier, pictures and Facebook "likes" are the same in every language. One of my uncles is twelve years older than I and knows how to write in English, so I usually funnel my communication through him.

I had the dream: a loving adoptive family and an adventurous and loving birth family. This was why my sexuality was a huge worry. Coming out to strangers was no problem, but potentially breaking this new bond was something I feared. It was public knowledge on Facebook as well and they liked the pictures of me with my boyfriend, yet they did not officially know.

One morning I decided to ask my uncle how he felt about gay people. He said he did not "agree". My heart shattered thinking of how this news would spread to the rest of the birth family. My uncle immediately followed up with, "But you are my nephew and I will always respect you. That will never change." Holding back my dramatic tendencies, we continued our conversation naturally. I also came to find out he was the only birth family member who felt this way. The rest were open and happy to have the chance of contact with me.



I am frequently asked what helped me form my identity as an adoptee. Those who indulge their curiosity and dare ask the question are flabbergasted when I reply, "I have always known who I am." I kindly remind many of them, who are usually in disbelief, that I had to learn who I was at a young age. The world was ready for me to be gay before

I even knew. To stop the world from telling me who I was, I had to learn and proclaim who I was for myself at age thirteen. In my experience within the LGBTQ+ community, no one cares if you are adopted. As boisterous as I am about my life and open with my story, there are those of us who cannot live the same way. Being LGBTQ+ and being adopted are just parts of my personal identity. It is character, morality, and personality that makes me a unique whole person.

Diego

My name is Diego and I'm a bisexual Colombian adoptee. My story is one that contains no known evidence of when or where I was born, or who my parents are. I was supposedly found under a bridge and it is unknown where I stayed prior to this. My age was approximated to be around 3 years of age and I suffered third degree malnutrition. I was taken to a local hospital for evaluation. I stayed somewhere unknown for an eighteen month period at a place equivalent to Colombian Child Welfare. I was eventually moved to the *Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar (ICBF)* where I remained until my adoption. In September 1979, I was adopted at approximately 5 years of age to an Italian/Irish family who lived outside Boston.

I arrived to the USA speaking only Spanish. I was a seemingly happy kid, eager to have a new life and fully unaware of what was about to unfold. I lost my language within 9 months, had my birth date changed from the date ICBF had given me, to one that better suited my parents, in order for me to be placed into a preschool the year after I arrived. I had my entire culture stripped away. Shortly after I arrived, I had one visit with a fellow Colombian adoptee who had been with me at ICBF, and I never saw her again. From that moment until I reached thirty-nine years of age, I rarely interacted with Colombian adoptees. Until my late thirties, I didn't know how to spell Colombia and had no real clue where it was, other than knowing it was in South America.



Growing up would be classified as pretty “normal”. I fell into the “obedient” adoptee category. My adoptive parents had a biological son, 2 years older than I. I fitted well into their religious narrative of Catholicism because I was born in a heavily Catholic country. I lived a life of mischief and manipulation, always finding ways to get what I wanted without rocking the boat too much. My life was very much an “underground/hidden” life-style that would become ever more present in my later years. My understanding of my sexuality became a difficult thing to comprehend and deal with, as time went on. Others who know me well have deduced that my way of life must have developed from being a street kid, trying to survive. If you were to ask people who know me after reading this story, they would say they don't believe it's about the same person.

I didn't fully become aware of the complexity of my sexuality until I was thirty-five years old but my exploration into sexuality started at a very young age with an interest in my girl friends. In particular, a fellow Colombian adoptee and later another Latina in middle school. I must have subconsciously chosen to explore with them because of my survival instincts, feeling I would be protected with them because they mirrored me. I had no real

cognitive notion about this but feel it was a subconscious choice. I found ways to sexually explore with them and later with other sisters of my friends.

Perhaps one could say this was “kids being kids and exploring” but I knew it was not right. My desires out rationalised logical thinking and I started to get bolder in my actions through middle school. My innate sense of knowing right from wrong, led me to stop. I was afraid of being caught and I’m sure on a deeper level, I felt a sense of shame and worried about the impact I might have on my family.

As I moved through middle school, I started to realise I felt attracted to other boys. By seventh grade, the awkward pre-teen years had started to pass, and I started observing boys and girls growing into their own and knew I had an attraction to both. I even ran in a cross-country race at school because of one particular boy whom I liked and wanted to be around. I vied for attention from many of the girls as well, always trying to be liked.

“Gay” was not a common word in our school and I certainly knew what it meant and that it was not accepted in my adoptive family, religion or community. I was careful to never let it be known about my attraction to other males. I thought something was wrong with me. I knew I was very attracted to girls and so I would say, “I am not gay!” when called out for my less than subtle overtures towards some boys.

The attraction to boys could not be suppressed when I got to the winter of my freshman year and my dad forced me to join the wrestling team. I didn’t want to do basketball because I was far too short and uncoordinated. I had no idea what to expect from the environment and I was awkward looking and feeling like an out of place freshman. There were more developed and some muscular guys on the team. I felt overwhelmed and intimidated and I didn’t want to be there. It was a fellow freshman who was blessed with early development who befriended me and helped get through my awkwardness.

Gradually we spent a lot of time together away from wrestling. It led to an incredibly intimate and impactful experience with him that abruptly ended in a negative way. He never spoke to me again until a brief moment in our senior year where I finally confronted him and apologised for what I had done. I lived 4 years of high school, deeply ashamed and confused about that experience with him which impacted me for decades later.

I constantly found myself still being attracted to other guys and girls. I was never able to have a relationship of any type except with a girl two years older during my sophomore year. She was a senior and it took almost a year before I officially



became the cause for her ending her four year relationship.

We dated that summer and through her first half year of college before she admitted she had met another guy. It was devastating because she was amazing for me, but I knew I had no chance. I would go the remainder of my high school career, single and vying for attention from a couple of girls and guys I had crushes on.

Never being successful with my efforts, I figured that moving as far away as possible was going to be the best chance for a fresh start. I was struggling with different issues ranging from family, adoption, to sexuality but it was not a conscious awareness. I moved from Boston to Seattle and happened to go to a college located a block away from the gay capital of the Northwest. I was scared and intrigued, so I quickly fell into the adoptee role of just trying to fit in. My alternative mischievous interests did not come out while I was attending the Catholic university as my path took one of being around Hawaiians and other people of colour.

That period at Catholic university was the most relaxed I'd ever been and I did not understand why, until later in life. It was because I was surrounded by other brown people who mirrored me. I lost my virginity the spring of my freshman year. She was in one of my classes, a couple years older than I and happened to already have a very young child. She was amazing dealing with a terrified virgin. It was a one time occurrence, never again revisited but never forgotten.

I went through the rest of my college career with no relationship and yet yearning for connection to someone, anyone. As that reality started to settle in, I sensed my need for validation. It continued to increase and I became riddled with shame for feeling attracted to another male. My life really took a turn during the first year out of college. I had left the confines of a protected university landscape, living on my own but with a roommate. I had a job and life seemed at my disposal. I became more liberated in my efforts to connect with other men but retreated to the confines of underground engagement and never in front of my normal crowd. These were late night escapades that occurred on and off for nearly a decade. I trudged on with my life of underground pining and shame. My attraction to both sexes made it easier to hide my attraction to men.

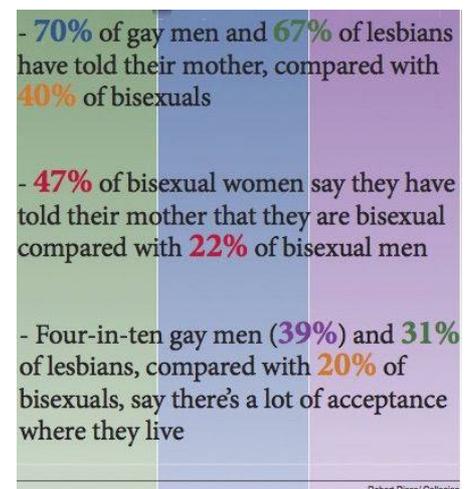
My attraction to women landed me a fortuitous opportunity but it once again involved my wooing another female away from her partner. I literally fell in love with this woman the moment I set eyes on her and declared to myself I would marry her as she walked into my office. Little did I know, she was my new employee and how quickly I was disappointed when I saw a huge shining rock on her left ring finger. I happily retreated to being a good boss who helped her learn the business. Quite quickly it became clear to me that this woman was in a controlling relationship. I became the person who was there to "help" her through a marriage she didn't want. Ultimately her marriage faltered within 9 months of us meeting. As that reality set in, I came to realise it was I who she had fallen for, as I had for her. I couldn't have felt like a luckier man! I dated the prettiest girl in our

company and everyone must have wondered, “How the hell”? Dating led to an engagement and eventually marriage, then our first child.

During our relationship, I was keeping and suppressing my big secret — my attraction to men. It took a pause during those initial years. The birth of my son was, as is for so many adoptees, the most amazing thing I ever experienced. The reality of being connected to my first blood relative. One would think that would be sufficient for me to feel satiated and accomplished in life. But it wasn't! Instead, a year after my son was born, I ended up having an affair with a woman down the block from where we lived. Intimacy had departed my marriage during my son's first year and while I was an ecstatic dad who adored his son, I was putting greater and greater distance between his mother and I.

I had a primal desire that needed satiation and as a result, I made a really bad decision. Once she found out, I owned up to her, our friends, her family, my family and anyone who had heard about it through the grapevine. We made an effort to rebuild our marriage in the following 4 years which also brought my daughter into this world. It was a blessing for me but my ex-wife later said she felt angry. We conceived our daughter shortly after my ex-wife learnt about my affair and it made her feel stuck in our marriage. I was intent on trying to ensure our marriage would not be a mistake and I felt I'd let everyone down and was being given a second opportunity.

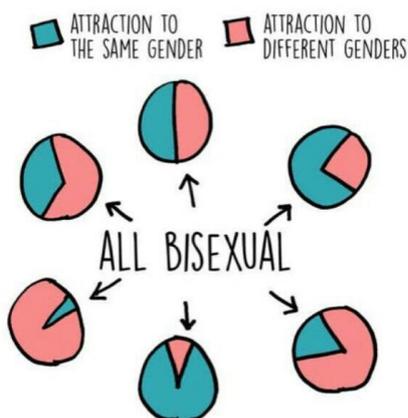
Unfortunately, the year following my daughter's birth flowed very much like that of my son. I was lacking in intimate connection with my wife once again. Determined not to repeat the same pattern of having an affair with another woman, I instead chose to return underground with men. A year later, my ex-wife discovered my cover. It appeared to her that I was communicating with another woman via text, but in reality, it was a guy. I had entered his details in my phone under a woman's name. Not wanting my ex-wife to go on believing it was another woman, I came clean to my wife about my long kept secret — about my attraction to females and males. This time, I was not willing or able to come clean to everyone else. It was the first time I ever researched “bisexuality”, but it just proved to be the straw that broke the camel's back. My ex-wife was not able to accept this revelation and our marriage was over. I lived in the house for another 9 months but then moved out. Our marriage dissolved a year later.



After being on my own for nearly a year, I ran into a woman I had casually admired from a distance for many years. I would pass her as I was driving and she would be running and pushing her red stroller up our long, inclining parkway through rain, snow and sun. Each time she seemed to have a radiant, infectious and friendly smile. We unexpectedly crossed paths in a very brief moment as I was offering her a celebratory shot of tequila.

Our eyes locked and the energy was palpable between us. In the next moment she was gone. The very next night, we again unexpectedly crossed paths. This time after she persisted a bit, we had some discussion on an array of topics, including a brief one on adoption. She told me she had a daughter adopted from India. I was not in the place of openly talking about my adoption at this stage. She also asked if I had ever gone back to Colombia and when I said no, she immediately said she would love to take me back some day. Our bond continued to grow and within a week, she came to realise she needed to move on from a marriage she had felt was over for years. She told her husband she was ready to end the relationship within a week, and he was too.

Months later over a phone call, I revealed to my girlfriend that I liked guys as well as girls. I had stumbled upon a random encounter with a high school sex education teacher who had clued me into the full nature and understanding of bisexuality. Our conversation had been without an ounce of judgement or shaming for the first time in my life. The biggest shock was that my girlfriend was fully accepting of me and my past when I told her about this. To say I felt liberated was a complete understatement! She let me know that she too was on the bisexuality spectrum and helped me understand what that meant. It further fuelled and sealed our bond!



She is a personal trainer and she has helped me redefine my body. For the first time, I felt I had the ability to look like the guys I always admired. Years of body dysmorphia issues had stopped me from fully embracing what she saw. Little did I know my newfound recognition and gradual acceptance of my body and sexuality would wreak havoc on our relationship in the following years.

I openly sought the attention of other women and then realised how unkind and damaging it was to my girlfriend. So I turned to seek attention from men. That also proved to be incredibly unkind and damaging for our relationship. In working through the situations and endless hours of communication and commitment on her part via professional counselling, I came to recognise I had major validation issues. I had spent most of my life seeking sexual and physical validation, needing acknowledgement from the other person that I was good enough.

I came to comprehend how I had subconsciously chosen to live my life — never feeling good enough, seeking it from other men because it was underground and in a space where there is little self worth or sincere connection. I am yet to fully embrace my bisexuality but because it seems to have a detrimental effect on my ability to have a healthy relationship, I continue to move towards a path of connecting with and understanding my essential self.

I continue to unpack my deep rooted validation issues and am learning to accept myself without turning to others to meet my needs. To the few close friends I've come out to as being bisexual, it feels good but I'm left at times still feeling a bit empty, not knowing my true purpose and wondering if it is my sexuality that impedes reaching my full potential. I question why my sexuality has had such control over my life. I was once told when I arrived to America via my adoption, that during a therapy session, I played with dolls and used the father doll to beat down the baby doll. The therapist deduced I might have been sexually molested as a child. I can't get that thought out of my head and all the terrible ways I've used sexuality as an outlet from a very young to middle age.

I've not found my biological family and part of me is a little terrified. I'm afraid to find the truths. It's not likely that I'd find my family but I wonder if I would be accepted by their Catholic society. Would I need to keep my sexuality locked away in order to feel accepted by my biological family? The possibility leaves me with more work to do as an adoptee. Hopefully one day I will be able to fully embrace the notion that my bisexuality is not what defines me but is instead, one part of many in who I am.

In the end, I'm gaining greater comfort in finding myself, sharing my story and allowing it to be without worrying how I might be accepted or rejected. The frightened little street boy within me will always want acceptance. I encourage those who have resonated with my story, to reach out to people like me and our adoptee community. I find our community is far more accepting and aware nowadays compared to when I was a child, teen or young adult. All I ever want is to connect with people like me. Being adopted and bisexual is tough and very few really understand. I know I continue to have work to do in understanding my bisexuality better and finding other non-sexual ways to seek validation and acceptance.

Emma

Firstly, I want to thank ICAV for reaching out to LGBTQ+ adoptees and giving us a platform to speak on. Truthfully, it was relatively recently that I had finally come to terms with my queerness; less than two years ago, during my freshman year of college, although I always had a feeling I wasn't quite straight. Thus, I don't have many stories yet regarding dating experiences or romantic relationships, but I can offer insight as to why it took me so long to "come out," and describe the way in which queerness, race, and adoptee status intersect to create a unique experience.

I was adopted from Seoul, South Korea in 1998 at 4 months of age. My immediate family is quite strange in that half of us are white and half are Asian. My mom and dad already had a biological son when I was adopted, and three years after me my younger sister was adopted from Seoul, and lastly my older brother was adopted from Hong Kong at the age of 8 years. Like many intercountry adoptees living in the westside of Michigan, my family is conservative Christian. Many of my internalised struggles are very tied to my religious upbringing. When I was a kid, I was taught that homosexuality was a "sin". I remember as a little elementary school aged child I asked my parents why being gay was a sin. They told me because it was against God's words, that gay people were choosing their lifestyle and choosing to turn away from "God's plan". This phrase, "God's plan," was said often and I was taught it was divine and good. "God's plan" is the reason why I was adopted, why my family exists, why something so sad as infertility and being abandoned as a baby is a good and beautiful thing. And the reason why I believed so much utter bullshit growing up.

To get a sense of how strong that fear was and how strong my religious faith and queer-phobia was as a kid, let me share a story. In fourth grade, I was super dizzy and disoriented from just starting medications for my various mental disorders, and while hallucinating accidentally kissed my best friend on the cheek. My best friend, who is also a girl and a conservative Catholic was very weirded out by the kiss and although it was just an accident, caused a fair bit of drama. From that day on, for years I would pray to God every day, often multiple times a day, "Please God, don't let me kiss a girl again." As you can see, ingrained in me from a young age was a fear of queerness; a fear of queer people and of the possibility I was queer.

Although my faith in Christianity was extremely strong as a child, in middle school, I started to question existence of God and by sophomore year of high school I was completely non-religious. From then on, I challenged the beliefs and biases I held due to my upbringing, although I still didn't realise I wasn't straight.

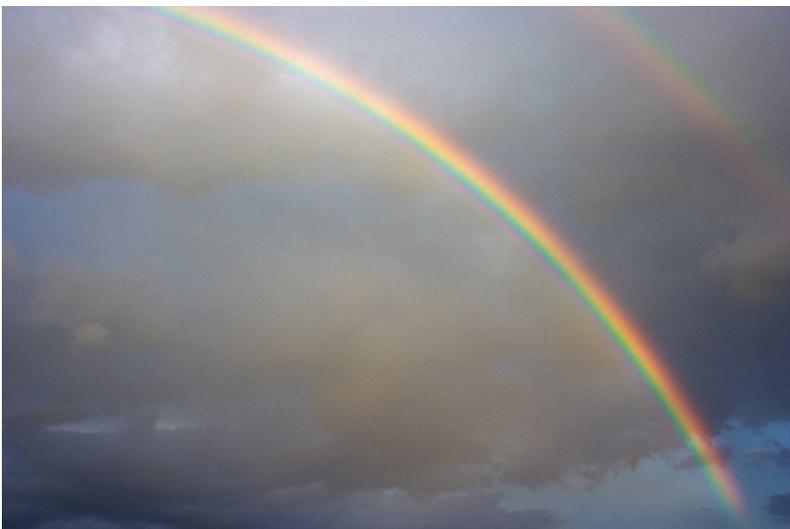
I was bullied a lot because of my race. Although my school district was considered diverse with more Latinx than white people, there were very few Asians. In middle school I was

made fun of nearly every day. From hearing ching chong chants to pulling back eyelids, I have heard and seen it all. It got so bad, I turned to self-harm. I hated myself, my face, my race, my personality, everything. I can only imagine how much more hellish it would have been if I was out then. In high school, the bullying stopped but was replaced with “jokes” made by my “friends” and fetishisation by several cishet men. Although eventually I did find some good friends and some Latinx families welcomed me into their homes, I felt like an outsider.

Even in my own family I feel like an outsider. As a young child, I would tell my mom I wanted to look like her; I wished I was white. Although I did not fully understand what race was, I knew there were differences between my Asian siblings and the other half of my family. I knew there was a reason my extended family treated my Asian siblings and I differently than my white brother and cousins. For that reason, I have never been close with my extended family and don't care about their opinions. In fact, I prefer they aren't close, as I don't want to put in the effort of coming out to them. As for my immediate family, I did sort of “come out” to them. Luckily for me, my parents' homophobia had started to lessen over time, although they still think it's sinful. I told my mom first, although I emphasised my aceness over my liking of girls and other genders. Slowly through my mom, the other family members became aware of it, although it's never been talked about openly. It remains a sort of hush-hush type of deal, a silent agreement to avoid talking about the topic. However, my siblings do seem to be mostly indifferent of my queerness, to which I'll gladly take over other alternatives.

Still, my parents seem incapable of truly caring about the struggles I face due to my identities. After the 2016 election, it was hard to even look at my parents in the eye, knowing who they had voted for, despite me trying to convince them otherwise. It hurt me in several ways: as a woman, as a person of colour, and as a queer person. I don't feel comfortable with my family and I don't feel safe talking about my struggles with them. Now, my mom is diagnosed with terminal cancer and I have even more family issues to work out. I am left with conflicting feelings of spite towards my mom because of her

mistakes, the love I have for her as a mother, and the fear of being motherless.



Interestingly, while being an adoptee of colour is a very isolating experience, it is my queerness that gives me a sense of community. Being quite liberal, my college campus is quite accepting of LGBTQ+ people and I for the most part, am not afraid to be myself. Compared to my hometown,

my campus is paradise. There are many student organisations for queer, trans, LGBTQ+ and people of colour! I am extremely privileged to be able to attend college and have access to safe environments.

Anytime I want, I can be surrounded by other queer people. However, when it comes to adoptees, the same can't be said. Even though I talk with other queer people of colour and we can bond over our shared struggles, have fun making white people and straight people jokes, I don't always feel like I belong fully. This is because as an interracial adoptee, I have been cut off from my original culture. I feel like an imposter who at anytime could be stripped of my visible Asian exterior, leaving my empty, whitewashed and at my core, exposed. While I have met three other Asian American adoptees during college, only one is a student and sadly for me she is graduating soon. But I am super grateful I had the opportunity to talk about adoption struggles with her. We both realised our shared struggle was something we had neglected to address for too long.

Being a queer, adoptee and woman of colour can be tough, to say the least. I rarely go a day without being made to think about at least one of my identities. Occasionally, I get lost in my concerns regarding my future. Especially about having a family and spouse. I worry about my family not accepting my choice in partner if they are not a man. I worry not so much for my sake, but for theirs. I worry about whether having biological kids together will be possible, but I also worry about the racism our kids will experience. Since I don't have a culture to pass on to them and lack a biological family, my children might also feel emptiness like I experience. Some days, I just want to scream. I didn't ask to be an adoptee. I didn't ask to be a woman. I didn't ask to be Asian. I didn't ask to be queer. However, I am all those things and I do ask and demand that I be respected and valued for who I am. Even though my circumstances have torn me down in the past, I am finally finding self-love. I am proud of myself and won't hide who I am anymore. I will continue fighting for a world where I, and others like me, can feel we belong.

Grace

I was born in the Philippines and adopted to the United States of American at 7 months of age to a single white mother. I have another adoptive sibling, also from the Philippines. I grew up on military bases and as a family, we attended protestant services. I was also heavily involved in church youth group but do not currently ascribe to any organised religion. I do consider myself very spiritual.

In tenth grade, I began questioning my sexuality and came out as a lesbian by twelfth grade. Later, I became involved with a cis man and realised the label “lesbian” was too constraining and began to identify as queer. When I was younger, I was always considered a tom boy but also expressed “femininely” at times. In my twenties, I found it affirming to discover the identity labels and terminology of “gender queer”, and “non-binary”.



Just as our world is deepening its understanding of gender and sexuality, people who identify as LGBTQ+ are also coming into their own understanding of their identities, what those identities mean to them as individuals, and how they fit into the context of societal understandings of gender and sexuality. Therefore, coming out is a continuous process, especially when we recognise the separate identity development experiences of gender and sexuality and how they influence each other. Coming out is highly circumstantial and contingent upon self-awareness and acceptance, and safety of surroundings to disclose.

When I first began to question my sexuality in grade ten, I was still heavily involved with a church youth group. In the United States the organisation is called *Young Life*, on military bases, it's called *Club Beyond*. I was very open with them about my questioning and they worked with me for a couple years exploring what the Bible says about homosexuality. At first it wasn't even personal, I simply didn't understand what was wrong about people of similar sex or gender being in relationship with one another. Later I would recognise the literature we were discussing surrounded a conversion therapy approach. Luckily, none of the unsubstantiated findings of these books resonated with me and I was not convinced that I was wrong in any way, for even thinking that being gay was okay.

When I met someone and fell in love the summer before my senior year in high school and fully came out as a lesbian, the youth group asked me to leave. Other than my experience with the youth group, my peers, teachers and family members were generally

supportive. Coming out as genderqueer and nonbinary has been relatively recent, since then, many of my friends and family members are still working on educating themselves.

As a younger person, I don't remember being teased much. If I was, it wasn't connected to being queer or adopted. I would say that being adopted can already feel very isolating, recognising one may be LGBTQ+ will only compound/complicate these feelings. In general, I would remind others in a similar situation to remember the world is complicated and we're all trying to figure it out; try to be patient and gentle with yourself. Most importantly, remember you're not alone! LGBTQ+ adoptees exist and have had, are having, the same questions and experiences as you. Seek us out, even if you have to do one identity group at a time (i.e., adoptees, people of colour, LGB, trans, disabled, etc). Seek out Facebook groups, find youth support groups in general, groups for queer people of colour and any other groups that are intersectional can be quite helpful. Put the word out for what you need. We're out here and we're all looking for each other, too.

One thing that helped me as a young queer person was learning queer history, especially the existence of queer and trans people in indigenous and pre-colonial communities. While I often felt a disconnect to my personal history and the Asian diaspora (Filipino culture specifically, for me), the queer diaspora was far more accessible. Learning about the expansive gender systems in precolonial Philippines and the reverence held for gender variant people helped me feel connected to my trans and queer self, and therefore my Filipino self as well.

I think dating is just as nerve wracking for LGBTQ+ people as it is for everyone. I think we may have a bit more nervousness surrounding acceptance and reciprocal attraction, but there are dating suggestions I would give that are universal. If someone doesn't accept you for who you fully are, then they are not right for you. Your time, energy, heart and body are sacred and you get to decide who is worthy of them. We may feel really lonely and isolated at times but the queer community is bigger than we think and modern technology connects us to people all over the world. Be sure to focus on your own fulfilment before seeking it in another.

As an intercountry adoptee, I think the factors that make dating difficult are the insecurities we inherit from being adopted. Fear of rejection, attachment or trust issues, etc. Explaining our family dynamics or having complexes with our racial identities. But everyone should be working through their own stuff. Focus on your own healing (lots of therapy if you have access to it) and seek people who are also doing their own work. You deserve the utmost alignment and happiness in your relationships.

As I have become more politicised over the years and my racial analysis has deepened, race is increasingly a factor when it comes to dating. Plus, just like everywhere else, racism and white supremacy are rampant in the LGBTQ+ community. While it's certainly not a requirement to be racially aligned, it's very important to me that we are politically

aligned. Since my politics are immovably confrontational and dismantling of the white supremacist/anti-Black racial dynamic, my time and energy, particularly romantically and intimately, with white people is greatly limited.

When I came out to my adoptive family, my adoptive sister was especially supportive. My mother was nervous at first, for my safety and wellbeing but quickly educated herself and became a strong ally and advocate.



I am lucky to have had an open adoption and to have been in touch with my family since I was in second grade. Being queer complicates things in the sense that adoptees frequently feel a fear of rejection in general. Knowing that there could be another reason why a biological family might not accept you can certainly be stressful. But I think it's important to keep our eyes on what is most important: our own wholeness and wellbeing. Whenever anyone is considering coming out, I always advise that everyone has their own journey and there is no "one right way" to come out.

Whether someone comes out or not is highly dependent upon safety and wellbeing. Knowing we have every right to be our full selves, there is no pressure to come out if you're not ready, or if the circumstances don't serve you or if your safety is jeopardised. If you're desiring to find your birth family, the same rule applies. You don't have to be out if it will compromise your wellbeing or safety. As LGBTQ+ people, we make difficult decisions regarding being out for the sake of maintaining family, job security, friends, safety all the time. Being strategic about when reveal our identity doesn't make us less whole or authentic, it simply reveals the prejudice we face and that we have to be more cunning when it comes to being our full selves.

I feel very fortunate to have been exposed to queer family structures and precolonial (non-western, non-nuclear) construct of family. Concepts of community rearing of children have helped remove this notion of having "a child of one's own". Deepening this concept would also help society work towards creating conditions in which adoption is not necessary.

Jaede

I was born in China to the USA at the age of almost 5 months old. My adoptive parents later adopted another child from China but eventually divorced. During my childhood, we were raised Catholic until I was 8 or 9 years of age but after that, I never attended church again and I'm currently not religious.

I first became aware of identifying as bisexual at age eighteen while I attended college. I wasn't really conflicted about this. It was just something about me. I didn't really know what to do with this new part of me. I didn't reject it, but I wasn't super sure how to proceed. I told my family and they were totally cool with it. They are only interested in my happiness, so are very accepting. There are some homophobic relatives that I'm not a fan of, which can make things a little awkward, but I don't really care. I understand it's not always safe to come out or that parents might not be as accepting as mine. But if someone decides to come out to people who aren't as accepting, I would kindly remind them that you are still the same person you were before, and that this is not a phase.



During my school years, I definitely got bullied but none of it had to do with being gay. It was mostly with being adopted. I would say the bullying came from a place of ignorance / lack of knowledge, rather than malice towards me personally.

In terms of dating, navigating this phase is hard. The dating pool is a lot smaller and at least for lesbians, they all know each other. I found a lot of gay girls on my rugby team who introduced me to others who identify as LGBTQ+. I think the most frustrating aspect is when people assume I'm straight because I'm not super "butch" or they tell me that I'm, "Too pretty to be gay!"

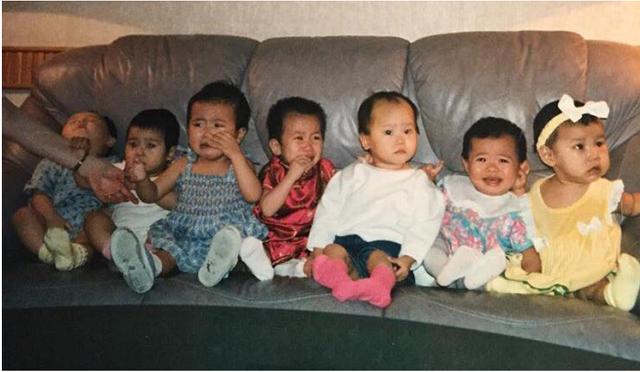
As an intercountry adoptee, I have not searched yet, but I eventually want to. I actually hadn't thought about how my birth family would react to me being LGBTQ+ until now. I guess it could complicate things. It wouldn't necessarily be something I'd bring up initially unless it was a huge part of my life such as if I were married to a woman.

I am not at the stage of considering a family of my own but but I can see how things might be a little more complicated for me. Things are getting better in our modern times as LGBTQ+ relationships are becoming more accepted. I definitely want to have children someday but it's going to be more complicated, as I will need to acquire sperm. I'm not opposed to adopting a child but I would like to have at least one biological child. That is something I'm adamant about and is important to me because I want someone who looks

like me. I don't really know how that would change if I found my birth family. Maybe I'd probably still want a biological child.

Jin

I was born in Jiangsu, China and adopted at the age of 6 months old in America by a white, heterosexual couple. I was raised Christian until I became an atheist at the age of sixteen, but it wasn't until eighteen years old that I came out as transgender.



I was subtly aware of the LGBTQ+ community growing up but I didn't become a part of it until later in life. I was already an awkward kid growing up and I didn't need being queer to make things worse. The first time I came out was to a couple of friends that I hadn't known for very long during my first year of college. Somehow I knew they would be accepting of me and able to help during my

transition. I was right on both accounts and to this day I am thankful that I had such good friends.

During elementary school, I was bullied for being Asian, for being different to everyone else. Growing up in a predominantly white community was difficult in that I had no one I could relate to or share a similar experience with. It was a little lonely, but I did have some good friends. Although these friends would never understand the struggle of growing up as a minority, they had my back and provided a great sense of belonging. I didn't struggle with being gay until middle school, which is when I began questioning my own sexuality. I never brought it up even with my close friends and didn't consider it until later in my high school years. At that point, I decided it wasn't anybody's business and I kept my sexuality to myself until I entered college where I found a great group of likeminded peers and close confidantes.

If I have any recommendations for other people of colour or part of the LGBTQ+ community, my suggestion is to find open minded and accepting people to become friends with. Find those who will support you no matter what and have your best interest at heart.

As for dating, I was never very good at it before or after I came out. I don't think I will ever be very good at dating. I think as long as you are willing to put yourself out there and take a chance, there will always be hope of finding someone who will love you for who you are.

Coming out to my family has been difficult, considering they're slightly homophobic and close minded people. My mom for the moment has not accepted that I am gay, let alone

transgender and I fear that if I were to push the topic too far, she would kick me out of the house. At this point in my life, I would rather not bring up the subject with her and remain living with her, rather than to try and make it on my own.

I have not made any plans or taken action to find my biological family at this point in time. It is something I would like to find out but is not a major priority in my life right now. It never really occurred to me that my biological mother would disapprove of my lifestyle, as I believe any mother / father should love their child unconditionally. But thinking about it now, I can see how it might complicate a reunion. In my opinion, I would rather not meet my biological family if it meant spending hundreds of dollars only to be disappointed and find they do not want me to begin with.

The family I found was a great group of friends I made while navigating the terrifying and new world at college. While my awkward personality did make meeting people and creating long lasting relationships difficult, it did prove to be worth it. Now I have a close group of friends that I wouldn't trade for the world.

If I have any suggestions for people out there trying to make it in this world, remember there are people like you. It might take a while to find them, but find people with similar interests and you're sure to find someone who will love and understand you for who you are.

At this time in my life, I do not expect nor want to have children.

Kate

I was born in Vietnam and adopted to Australia at 10 months old. My mum and dad adopted me as they did not believe they could have children and then 5 years later, conceived my brother.

I was raised as a Catholic and I first became aware I was attracted to girls in high school when I had a secret crush on my best friend in year 9. I didn't tell anyone and hoped it was just a phase as I was embarrassed. I came out in my early twenties. It was nerve wracking and I sat all the people I was close to down individually and told them. Sometimes it was excruciating because I didn't know how they would react and I wondered if I would lose them. Many said they already suspected or knew. Nearly everyone who meant something to me embraced me and said nothing would change about how they felt and I was still loved and still me.

I wasn't teased for being gay at school because I wasn't out at that stage. I would say that in today's school system there are more measures in place and a better understanding of diversity. My suggestions are to speak with an adult you trust, maybe it's your teacher, or student welfare. There are also many LGBTQ+ youth organisations and help lines you can call on, to speak about how you are feeling or being treated. Know you are not alone and there are many people who are questioning who they are and sorting out who they are attracted to.

In terms of dating as a lesbian, I imagine it is just as complex in the hetero world as it has been for me. It's not easy these days to meet someone in real life. I've found most of my partners using online dating websites. This can be fraught, having to wade through a lot of people with emotional baggage, before I connected with someone who wasn't crazy!

My coping mechanisms in dating have been not to give everything away too quickly, not to expect someone to take care of my stuff, regarding adoption and issues around that. I think this is standard for any adoptee in a relationship and not just because I am a lesbian. I have to be conscious of not expecting my partner to take care of me, fill the void that sometimes comes with intimate relationships and issues around abandonment and rejection. It can be very hard



for me to really trust someone, or other times I have given much away too quickly because I wanted someone to love me.

The real lesson I am only really learning now is that the only person I can really depend on, is me, first and foremost! The more I love and accept myself, the less it matters about getting validation from my partner. I can meet her more as an equal rather than expect her to be my protector or want more than she can give.

I haven't found being of Asian origin an issue when dating. I am aware I am not interested in dating Asian people. I'm not racist but I recognise I am not as attracted to Asians as I am to Caucasians. I guess I would encourage those who are just coming out to be who you are. I've never really felt the need to gravitate towards other LGBTQ+ Asians for support or understanding.

Like any child who comes out to their parents, it can be difficult. I don't believe I had any particular difficulties coming out to my family that I link to being adopted. My dad did respond by asking if it was his fault because he didn't spend enough time with me when I was younger. I jokingly replied, "Don't worry because if it is genetic, then you and mum are both off the hook!"

My parents did take a while to accept it. I think they were disappointed because they thought this meant they wouldn't get grandchildren. But they did! My partner at the time, had our first child and mum stupidly said, "How will I connect with her when she is not biologically related?" I just looked at her and said, "In the same way you did with me!" "Oh, right!" she replied.

Probably the most difficult thing was when my parents told me I wasn't allowed to tell my aunts and uncles - their brothers and sisters. They wanted to be the ones to tell them. I always thought this was unfair because it was my story and my life. I think they were trying to protect themselves. Maybe they were also trying to protect me in who they told first and gauge the reactions and be a buffer. But I was an adult when I came out and still think to this day it should have been my decision to tell my aunts and uncles.

I am currently searching for my biological family. It has crossed my mind about what happens the moment I tell my birth mother and bio family members that I am a lesbian. I don't know how that will go, but I think that is the least of my worries at this stage. Finding any of them is the biggest challenge for me at the moment.



Prospective Lesbian Parents (PLP) VIC

In terms of considering parenting and having children, my ex-partner and I attended a group called prospective lesbian parents. It is what it sounds like: a group for lesbians who are

considering parenthood. We attended several information nights on topics of all the different ways to conceive, legal issues, etc.. I found it very informative and supportive and we met couples going through similar issues. These days there are now social media groups providing support which didn't exist back then.

My ex had our first two children and I had our last one. There was always a strong desire to have a child of my own purely because of biology. She is the only bio related family member to me. I would have liked to have another bio child, but felt that 3 was more than enough.

The most recent challenge was having a rainbow family during the time of the Australian marriage equality debate. Prior to this, we had not experienced any major challenges or discrimination. I've never felt so protective of my kids as during this time because I am a lesbian and we are a rainbow family. I felt like we were under threat and being examined under the microscope. I felt like the whole country was judging us and had a say in something that was none of their business. I wanted to protect the kids from all the backlash and horrible things some people were saying.

The only other minor inconvenience was when we had to fill in paperwork and the word father was there instead of parent. This is changing now and people, government bodies, and organisations are being more inclusive. We had to fight to get the laws changed about birth certificates for our children, but this has happened now. We were also not recognised as being in de-facto relationships back then, but are now and can get legally married. Another difference is having to explain sometimes how I have two white kids (ex is Caucasian) and one Asian! But that hasn't happened for some time.



Koal

I am adopted from Taiwan to the USA at the age of 3 months. My adoptive family include my parents, a sister, and 2 half brothers. My parents divorced when I was 3 years old and my mum kicked me out of home when I was thirteen. I then went to live with my single dad.

I first became aware I was not cis at 4 years old though I did not know trans terminology. I laugh now about how I felt and dealt with this but when I was young, I was convinced I was not human but a robot. I believed my parents knew I was a robot but would not tell me. In my mind, this accounted for both my feelings around my gender and why I did not look like my parents.

I came out around age eighteen. I lost friends in doing so which was pretty devastating and frustrating. My family accepted me 100% but bumbled over things like gender markers and pronouns.

During my school years, I was accused of being a lesbian in middle school. Sometimes people made rude remarks about my masculine interests in things like motorcycles or reptiles. This didn't affect me much though but I did get frustrated with other kids frequently asking about my adoption and my family.



In middle school, I dealt with these challenges by being physically aggressive. In high school, I just mellowed out and learned to let things go. For others going through that phase of life, from my experience there is no one way to deal with or avoid these scenarios. People are ignorant and mean and this phase is just one of many that hone a thick skin. My advice would be to cling to the people in

your life who understand and accept you. Having social validation from somewhere is so important. Fight feelings of isolation as much as possible through communication and a strong sense of self.

I never cared much for dating maybe because things felt too complicated. I am in a long term relationship now and I prefer the security as opposed to dating. To cope with relationships I imagine everyone around me as a baby or toddler. It helps me conjure the patience that it often takes to educate someone when they don't understand my perspectives of the world. I feel like there are so many traditions in dating that have to be unlearned in LGBTQ+ relationships. For example, traditions around assumed dominance

i.e., who pays for dates, who holds the door, who's hand is on top, who "belongs" to who? These assumptions and traditions are so frustrating to me because I don't care to be squeezed into a box suggested by my assigned sex. I think these seemingly harmless assumptions are the most hurtful.

Race used to matter a lot more to me in the dating scene than it does now. I was always so frustrated with everyone who didn't immediately understand the micro-aggressions I faced. Initially, I felt like only people of colour (PoC) could understand. Then I found out that even queer trans PoC don't understand the micro-aggressions around transracial or intercountry adoption. I found myself just frustrated with *everyone*. I guess the impact is that I had to learn to be more patient with others, because I cannot expect people to understand my unique experience. It's just not realistic. Everyone can be ignorant and hurtful regardless of race.

For LGBTQ+ adoptees who are just coming out my helpful tip is to have cannonball determination and dragon skin. People may try to knock you down every step of the way. Stay resilient, but stay humble. Remember we have a grand and robust perspective of the world, but that does not make us flawless. Stay woke.

In terms of coming out as being LGBTQ+ to my family, they were hugely supportive but still have a hard time with things like pronouns and gender markers. I had to come out to my mom twice because I don't think she quite understood what non-binary was the first time.

I spent a large amount of my college career learning to be an ally trainer and learning the words to help people understand LGBTQ+ identities and terminology. I think this helped me a lot in coming out. Being patient and having low expectations helped a lot too.

Overall, it has been difficult for me to wrap my head around my family's white saviourism that led to my adoption. I grew up hearing a lot of stories about "how horrible Taiwan is to their girls" and I had to debunk a lot of that to have any kind of pride for my birthplace. Covert racism is generally very hard for me to deal with in my family. My dad always says I look like every Asian person he sees and my sister once told me she couldn't date a black man. My heart just doesn't know how to deal with these kind of things.

I haven't searched for or found my biological family. I do think being LGBTQ+ complicates things. I don't know if I want to find my birth parents for fear of rejection and I just don't care to come out again.

I struggle with understanding whether I have a desire to have children or not. It is painful to think of having bio kids in my own body because of dysphoria. For a long time I wanted to adopt, but I am also afraid that if I have kids, my own screwed up upbringing will affect them. It all feels very complicated.

Mara

I remember the first time a girl came on to me. She had told me in an act of innocent drunkenness that she thought I was attractive. We laughed and were surrounded by most of our equally drunk friends as well. So the moment in time passed without any further thoughts given to it. But one night she stayed over and before we fell asleep, she held my hand. There were no words, and in the dark silence we laid there, sharing something forbidden, a little thrilling, but overall very cariñosa. Lying there I was terrified. Ecstatic, caught by the surprise of it all, terrified that it was happening and that I didn't know how to respond. I'd never felt so unprepared and yet relieved, as though I'd been waiting for it my whole life, all at once. Just like the compliment, the moment came and passed and we didn't spend much time together after that.

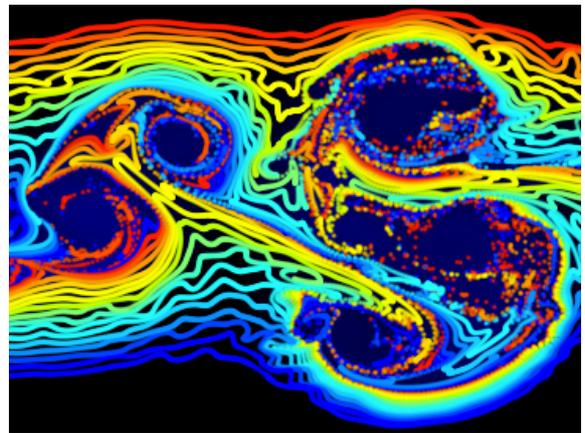
Lately, I've been reflecting back on that night and other moments that seem to tell my story like a spiderweb. I've come to find that nothing really happened in the order it seems "coming out" is supposed to and frankly, I don't really think I'm done "coming out". Being classic me, I decided to sit down and write out my story. There are some pieces missing and there are a lot of tangents, run-ons and fragments. It wouldn't really be my voice if it didn't. But I wanted to share it with you anyway because what good are our experiences if they aren't shared?

I don't really believe in coming out. Not for me, anyway. At least, not this romanticised idea of this one moment, or this one point in your life when you "come out". It just doesn't fit in with how I've experienced coming out. It's taken me years and I'm still not even halfway "out". I don't just mean it has taken years to reach the point where I could come out. Sure, I "came out" 4 years ago and everyone in my life knows. I am, by any standard, "out". But what does being "out" really mean? It doesn't just mean people knowing. Not in my case. It can't. Hearing me say I'm "out" does not equate to knowing or understanding. You can understand homosexuality in its most basic sense, but to really understand what that sexual orientation/identity means to an individual, goes beyond. I want people to understand how my sexual orientation shapes me, where it moulds who I am, and where it doesn't affect who I am at all.

The moment I stopped denying or avoiding being queer was a life-altering moment. But it certainly wasn't the end. I didn't say to myself afterward, "Whew! Glad I got that off my chest. Let's move on now, shall we?" Years after that first uncovering, I'm still trying to figure out what happened. What did that mean for me now? I am constantly re-learning how to live the way I always have, but now as something else — something I was all along, but not someone I allowed myself to live as. And in some spaces that means learning to live as a faggot — an outsider in some places, and suddenly an insider in new spaces. It means constantly trying to negotiate my existence — my limitations, my expectations, and the expectations placed upon me. I am continually moving back and

forth with myself in a love-hate relationship. At times angered by my “otherness”, other times empowered by it. The thrill of my first kiss in public. The fear of the looks or questions that come the first time I used the word “girlfriend” in front of others. The pain, and almost shame of my first heartache. The fear that maybe I couldn’t do it. Maybe I waited too long to let myself be who I really am, and now it’s too late. Maybe I’ll have to settle for someone who doesn’t make me as happy as she did; or with a man, more because I can, and it’s easier.

Many of these reflections and experiences didn't begin the first moment I let the words, “I like women” spill out of my mouth. I have deep respect and admiration for the people who chose to come out in an important way: as a difficult conversation, practicing their speeches over and over before the final delivery; as a celebration, finding creative ways to bring people together in an act of gratitude for their support; however those first moments looked. But I chose to do things a little differently. In most cases, never telling people directly at all and allowing them to discover me on their own – through my relationship, a mention of it in conversation, a facebook profile, a blog, chisme. How I've experienced being queer has felt fluid, with no real beginning or end. If it was drawn on a timeline it could not be drawn in a singular path. I would not know where I started and where I ended, where my own recognition of self began or ended, and where I currently am. "Coming out" over and over to people was not something I deemed necessary but mostly something I was unable to do because I'm still in the process of “coming out”. I am continuously in it. Even if I had wanted to find a place in my life to tell everyone at one point, I'm not sure where it would have happened. And to be honest, I'm not sure if I'd still be where I am today in my journey, if I had.



Growing up people never felt safe or comfortable around me until they could put me in a box. Being in the "adopted" box made white people feel okay around me because I was thought of as "one of them", not an angry minority of colour wanting to threaten their power or call out their privilege. I later realised staying in the closet was my way to avoid scaring or making straight people feel uncomfortable. Now, I revel in my ability to do both as an Jota (Queer Latina).

For as far back as I can remember I've always liked girls. Women, to be more specific. I never had any crushes on the girls my age or even at my schools. But I'd fall shamelessly in love with the women on TV or even the occasional woman at the supermarket. I figured it was deep admiration or possibly the jealousy of a child in anticipation for womanhood. I liked boys fine and that seemed enough of a sign that I was straight.



Whatever “straight” meant for a 7 year old. But I never felt the way about boys that I did about women. Women I appreciated. I found their complexities only more intriguing; their mannerisms and fluidity intoxicating. The way women could move between gender lines, manipulate their sexual expression, create art with their voices or even their own bodies, the way they seemed to connect with everything around them — yes, with women I found myself in awe.

The thing about being a transracial adoptee is that I grow up slightly different than my fellow gente. Lost to our homelands and culturas, most of us grow up in areas where we don’t see large populations of people who look like us and often times our families themselves are very white. If we’re lucky, especially in the 90s, we might see people like us in movies, TV, and maybe a magazine. We learn who we are as people of colour from

these images. We see how people look at us when they ask us, “What are you?” We hear what people say about us when they think we can’t hear, or when they assume we’re “one of them” because we’re adopted. I internalised it all. As a young girl I created fantasy images of what other Latinos and Colombians were and weren’t.

And the Latinos I saw were definitely not gay and lesbian. That being said, the only queer women I ever knew growing up, were either the few in my various schools and a friend of my mom’s that we all wondered about. None of them were ever Latina.

The lesbians in my various schools were outcast, ridiculed, hated, beaten, and eventually (and without fail) expelled from school for being caught kissing another girl. I remember not understanding why people cared but being horrified that people did. The same way I learned that people seemed to care and needed to know I was adopted. I remember feeling extreme embarrassment and fear for my attraction to women and I made sure nobody ever knew about it. Aside from my former classmates, the only adult queer women I saw (including my mom’s friend) were butch. Short hair, no make-up, men’s clothing and boots. None of the Latinas I ever saw were like them. So I associated that with women who liked women and immediately concluded I was simply confused. Lesbians in my young mind, were clearly white butch women. If I was lesbian, I figured I would be like them. Therefore, I must not be a lesbian. Well, on the bright side, I was half correct.

I didn’t learn what “bisexual” was until mid-way through high school. I remember having heard the word before, but not completely understanding it until some time later. I think a large part of me knew by that point that I did not solely like men. But it was easier than trying to pursue something as big as possibly liking women. Looking back, I realise I was

more scared of accepting that I liked women, than I was of actually being with a woman. And more importantly, I knew if I discovered I in fact did like women, I would then be confronted with having to tell people and I was scared to death of this possibility.

I was scared of being treated like the girls in school. I was scared of being detested and being loathed. I was scared of being rejected. I didn't want the girls to be afraid of changing around me in the locker room. I didn't want religious people trying to "save me". I didn't want my mother to cry, or my best friend to stop answering my calls. I didn't want my sister or my cousin to be embarrassed of me. And most importantly, I didn't want to change. I just wanted the feelings I had for women to go away. I didn't think there was anything wrong with liking women — in fact, I very much enjoyed liking women. But I understood well enough how the rest of the world viewed things, and I didn't want to be any different than I already was. I hated keeping my feelings private but I saw no other option.

I already got enough weird treatment for being adopted. People either poking and prodding me with questions or their ignorant opinions of adoption; or their tendencies to throw me and my family on a golden pedestal, praising us for some sort of heroic and noble deed – exoticising me as one of the fly-covered children from TV. The last thing I needed at this already confusing, coming-of-age time in my life, was to add another "identity crisis" log to the fire. I needed more time to figure things out.

Flash forward and for the first time in college I began to meet a variety of people, women and Latinas who exposed and challenged me in the LGBTQ+ world. I finally started to meet more lesbians and bisexuals whom I could identify with. I also met some that I couldn't identify with but wanted to – women who were radical, Chicana and Jota in ways that I aspired to. These people talked about "gender fluidity" and challenged my Latino comunidades. For the first time, I heard things that paralleled how I had experienced myself and my sexuality but had never had the words to describe, until now.



And not just words – I found my experiences expressed with words composed into poetry, spoken word, painted on a canvass, accompanied by music, splashed on a protestor's sign. Written in the spaces of my textbook pages in the form of love letters or of an angered woman arguing with the author, as if to really say, "You don't know me, motherfucker. You don't know the experiences of queer love." Who were these women, I wondered. Where did they come from? How did they get to where they are? Why am I so behind? I wanted to get to where they were. They seemed so knowledgeable in who they were and what they believed. I envied them. I had only begun to touch the surface with being a Colombian adoptee let alone an Jota. I had only begun to pull the love, the fierceness and the pasión de mis antepasados from within, out. These mujeres

made me wonder how the search for my roots could (and maybe already did?) intertwine with my sexuality. I wondered if I had the ability to be that grounded and strong. That free. And how could I create with parts of myself that I had pushed back for such a long time?



Ta Da! I came out and now here I am today, a certified and all-knowing Jota! Whew, that took FOREVER!

But if only it were that easy. For a while, I kinda thought it would be. All those women that seemed to have figured it out and made it look easy. I came to find out that this whole “growing up” thing doesn’t really end. No matter how much we think we know about who we are or what we believe, or even what we are (labels?), we end up getting a kick

in the ass that says, “Nope! Try again!” Sometimes it takes years to realise we already grew into ourselves and now things are deeper and more complex. That’s a lot of what happened to me.

I began picking up books where other Queer Latinas and Jotas were able to share their experiences. I began seeing where their experiences intersected mine and where my sexuality played a significant role in my identity as a Latina, an immigrant, a transnational and transracial adoptee. I began to dissect and understand the experiences I had as an adolescent through a different lens, and I allowed myself to be uncomfortable. To be placed in spaces both physically and emotionally which challenged what I thought I knew about myself and the things around me; challenged what and who I believed in, and more importantly WHY I believed. For the first time in my life I allowed myself to be critical. To be pushed. To be internally split and ripped into separate pieces, only to be placed together again, differently each time. To try new moulds, to shape them in new perspectives. To say, “I was wrong” or even simply, “I know this to be right for me”. I think the best and hardest part of the process in allowing myself to be immersed in transformation, is the constant feeling of surprise.

I am constantly surprised by new people, ideas, theories, identities and arte that I encounter and the impact these have on me. I never completely figured it out or have a complete grasp on the limits of what’s out there. For example, I didn’t even meet another queer transracial adoptee until a year ago. This was after I’d been out of college for a year. And just the other day I read an oral history of someone’s coming out process as a Mexicana. I was shocked at how empowering and saddening it was, at the same time, I was stunned a little on how much it questioned my own politics. I thought I had heard all the “classic Latina coming out” stories. I was wrong. It’s refreshing and even exciting to know I’m not done learning about myself but it’s also frustrating that I’ve not figured it out already. Not even close. It makes answering all those questions people have about

“what I am” even more difficult to answer. It makes moving forward and making big life decisions difficult.

If I could have found one moment in my history to have told everyone, I think it would have dramatically changed how I got here and where exactly “here” is. Even the “rehearsed family conversation” happened over a series of talks throughout the past 3 years. These conversations continue today with the evolution of my sexuality, my experiences and how I relate to my family as an adoptee. The conversations I have with my Mexican-American father, my white mother, my sister and cousin, mis amigos, otros Jotos, the people at my work, the strangers reading my blog - they always look different. I am continually being re-moulded every time I speak. And the ironic part is I’m really not even halfway to understanding myself as “out”, as a queer Latina, as a queer transracial adoptee — as either Mariela Henao born in Bogota, Colombia or as Mara, raised by Ann and Rick in the United States.

If coming out is supposed to be, or understood to be, the moment in your life when you walk out of the mystical straight closet and brand yourself forever, then consider my coming out as a lot like me – running late, and taking longer than a normal person should in accomplishing it.

Miles

My name is Miles and I was born in Sao Paulo, Brazil. I was adopted at 2.5 years old by a heterosexual couple in the Midwestern United States. I was raised with one older sister who was adopted a few years before me from the Philippines. My dad had two sons from a previous marriage who were much older and already living on their own by the time I joined the family. My parents were both practicing Catholics and raised us to go to church weekly. I also went to an all-girls catholic high school. This had a large impact on my experience of discovering my own identity, coming to terms with it, and coming out.

I did not come out until my sophomore year of college at age eighteen when I told my parents I was queer and in a relationship with a woman. I then came out as transgender at age twenty in my senior year at college. I honestly figured out I liked women pretty young (probably 5th grade) but it just took me a long time to accept it. I came out to my first person at age seventeen. I sometimes wonder how much earlier I would have figured out my gender identity had I been exposed to any information about this during high school. I was in a school that constantly reminded us we were “girls” and “young women” and I always got put back in line if I dared to wonder.

I didn't deal with any teasing or bullying in high school because I wasn't out yet but in college, I had some isolated incidents outside of my friend group which I had made primarily through the Gay Straight Alliance (GSA). I think being adopted did complicate things for me because I felt an added pressure to be who my parents wanted/expected so that they wouldn't regret my adoption. My fear of losing family was intensified because it had happened once already at my relinquishment. Being a transracial adoptee adds to this as I was already the only black one in my family. For me, I felt I was different enough already and didn't want to add to the divide.



My advice for adoptees would be the same as my advice to all LGBTQ+ individuals — that is, find a supportive group of friends so you aren't going through these fears and struggles by yourself. Dating as a trans person is already incredibly difficult and being a transracial adoptee, in my experience, adds to the challenges. I am not who people expect me to be, based on my race and being raised differently from most people of my race.

I am at a point in my life of wanting to date other black folks because it is easier for me to relate to them. I have experienced life as black person. This is really tough because my experiences of being black are based solely on judgement from others about my skin

colour, but yet I have none of the cultural aspects as my truth. I feel like I'm a unicorn looking for another unicorn and it's very difficult. My best coping mechanism is to find supportive groups and people, including other LGBTQ+ adoptees. Being able to accept myself and value my own happiness sometimes over the need for acceptance in my family. I also value finding spaces where maybe I don't fit in, because I never do, but that I belong in and am accepted in, with all the intersections of my identity.

My immediate family have been overall very supportive of my queer and trans identities. They don't fully understand but they still love and care for me. It took a while for name and pronouns to adjust and they still struggle with this sometimes, but they are definitely accepting of me. My extended family hasn't been as easy but with my immediate family providing so much support, it has helped. My relationship with my parents is actually better now than before I came out, which I never expected.

I am not currently searching for birth family though I've started by getting my documents. I ran into some obstacles because my adoption agency no longer has offices in my country of origin and I haven't put a lot of effort into dealing with this yet. Being trans is definitely something I've thought about in regards to searching. I wonder if I ever find my birth mom how I would handle explaining that she gave birth to a female baby and doesn't see a female in front of her. I am also nervous about whether she would accept me. This is assuming I could even find her and whether she would want a reunion. It's a huge mystery which I find intimidating to contemplate.

I do not have the desire to have biological children but I do hope to someday to be a foster parent. That's still far in the future for me and I haven't put a lot of thought into it. I don't know how being queer and trans will impact that experience for me.

Oliver

My name is Oliver. I was born in 1996 in Bangkok, Thailand and adopted to Adelaide, South Australia to an Australian father and a British mother. I have an adopted brother, 2 years my junior with a learning disability and an adopted sister, 6 years my junior. None of us are biologically related and we look nothing alike. Growing up, I lived in a small country town located on the outskirts of the city and occasionally attended our Anglican church. We were not strictly religious and by the time I was ten years old, we had stopped attending church altogether. Religion did not control our lives. By age ten and at the onset of puberty, I was beginning to have homosexual feelings, however, I did not know what this was as I had a girlfriend at the time.

By the time I was twelve years old, I was ready to come out. I told my mother while I was doing dishes after dinner. I was scared. She was shocked and quite taken back. She told me I was too young to know these things and that I had to wait until I was older to decide. At the time, I did not understand why she was saying this, but in hindsight, it is probably uncommon for a twelve year old to come out. It probably sounded quite erroneous.

During my middle school years, I was a victim of terrible bullying. After coming out at the age of twelve, a group of my best friends turned on me. I had my school bag stolen, was held upside down by my ankles, punched and threatened with having my house burnt down. I knew this was a real threat because they knew where I lived. Thankfully, they never followed through on their threat. At another point, they even left a lewd message on the home phone's answering machine which my mum played upon arriving home. My mum called the school dean, who was a close friend of the family, to come and listen to the voicemail. The next day, the boy who made the phone call was expelled.



During this time, I attended many interviews with teachers and had many sessions with the school counsellor. I was in a very depressed state of mind and would become incredibly angry for little reason. I used to carry around a box cutter to cut myself, used it to cut my knees, a place easy to disguise cuts and scars due to the wrinkled nature of knee skin. I don't really understand the science of how it works, but physical pain seemed to offer temporary relief of depression. There were multiple times during this period that I almost attempted suicide.

A few years later, when I was working at a part time job, this boy found out where I worked and repeatedly visited just to harass me. He would threaten me and moan about how I ruined his life and how he has to attend a public school. It was shocking to know that one of my best friends could turn out like this. We were friends since primary school, but now, we were so different and hated each other.

My advice for other LGBTQ+ people, or anybody being severely bullied, is to get help from the school. Approach your teachers, counsellors and Principal and demand change. If not, contact the police. As a twelve year old, I did not know that in many instances I should have called the police or simply left school grounds without telling anybody. Yes, there are laws about duty of care, stating that a child under seventeen must stay at school in South Australia - but if that school is not a safe environment, then who is to say that a child can't just leave the grounds if they are in physical danger? For me, it was allowed to escalate for too long before anything was done.

If I had to live through this period again, I would have demanded to my parents to allow me to be homeschooled or change schools entirely. At the time, my parents were incredibly stubborn and apathetic. Changing schools was such an inconvenience. In current times however, my sister, while not LGBTQ+, was bullied badly and was allowed to change schools in year 9.

Being a gay asian male has severely affected my dating life. Even though I came out at age twelve, my first boyfriend was at age sixteen. He was a boy obsessed with anime and everything related to Nintendo. I have not had a boyfriend since. Asian males are generally seen as weak and feminine by white people. It's okay to be friends with an asian male but it is never okay to date one. Many of my gay/bi friends have asked me for dating advice but have all explicitly stated, "You're not my type". Why is it that Asian women are "exotic" but Asian men are "feminine"? The media helps to perpetuate this stereotype. As a result, the dating pool for gay asians is even smaller than that of the general gay population and I have found that most have already dated each other.

"FLOWER BOYS" IN K-POP CULTURE (ACTORS AND SINGERS): THE PROMOTION OF "SOFT" MASCULINITY



I would suggest to other LGBTQ+ Asian adoptees not to get their hopes up and accept that they will almost always be rejected by white people. This is not a problem with the adoptee but it is white people who need to face themselves. Most white people don't realise how racist they actually are. How many times will a person of colour (PoC) hear, "You're not my type" or, "It's just a preference". You might only say it once but I have heard it a thousand times. I don't need to be reminded.

My adoptive family has generally been very supportive of my coming out. Most of my adoptive family knows except the grandparents on one side. I doubt they would approve. The most difficult aspect within my adoptive family is the cultural differences and misunderstandings between both homo and heterosexual cultures. For example, my mum says that I should just, "Go out and talk to guys" or, "Just find a boyfriend". The problem with this is, firstly I cannot just ASK somebody if they are gay and secondly, it is highly improbable they would be interested in me. Before people jump down my throat, let me ask, how many asian male+white female couples do you know? Probability. Statistics.

In terms of searching for my biological family, I have met my biological grandmother and aunt on several occasions. Being gay definitely complicates matters! When I first met them, I discovered my mother is a lesbian. I have not met her yet and I imagine she doesn't want me to know this aspect of her life. I have not come out to my biological family but according to the social workers, my grandmother may already know. Apparently she could judge this from my body language. It is such a miracle I turned out the way I did, since my mother is a lesbian.

At twenty two years old, I have not truly considered having a child. I am barely a child myself and I lack the maturity to consider parenthood. I have no desire to have children whatsoever at this stage of my life.

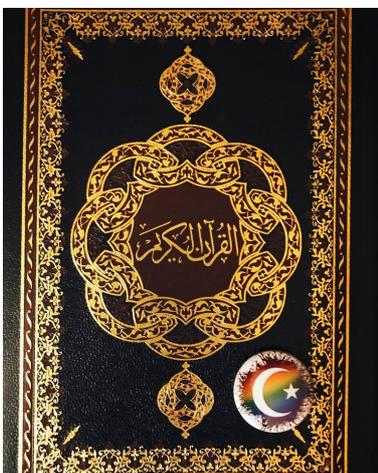
Qamar

I was adopted from China at eleven months of age by American parents. My mom's family has been in the USA for several generations and my dad was born in the USA with immigrant parents from Greece and Turkey. Our family is a mix of races and ethnicities. I've known I was adopted ever since I can remember and my parents encouraged me to ask questions whenever I had them.

I'm fortunate to say my parents were also open-minded on social justice related issues. This meant when I began to realise there was something different about my sexual orientation, I felt comfortable to talk with them. While friends began showing interest in the opposite sex, I noticed fairly quickly I had no interest in casual or more serious relationships with anyone – male or female. I assumed I was a late bloomer but the pattern of no interest in finding a significant other continued into college.

Although I did have a year-long relationship with a guy, it felt as if I were going through the motions. I did what I assumed dating should be, according to information friends had shared with me. I liked the guy as a friend but the physical aspect of the relationship wasn't my cup of tea and I felt no sexual attraction. Even before I had sex, I already had a gut feeling it wasn't for me. Then I came across the term "asexual" and it seemed to fit me perfectly. I shared this realisation with my parents and they told me to take my time and not to worry too much since they knew that relationship stuff was on the bottom of my priority list.

Initially, I wasn't aware that "asexual" was included in LGBTQA+. I thought the A stood solely for "ally" but friends in the queer community told me otherwise. Ever since, I have started identifying as queer but I was also extremely aware I didn't face the struggles that someone who is homosexual or trans encounters. There is undoubtedly a degree of privilege in that. However, my lack of interest in physical intimacy caused issues when I tried to get to know guys more.



Since coming back to my hometown from college, I've become involved with an LGBTQ+ progressive Muslim group that provides a safe space for queer Muslims and those from a Muslim background. I myself am Muslim – well, more a secular agnostic Muslim, since I personally can't ever be sure about the absolute existence or non-existence of God. I thought I had finished figuring out my sexual identity but recently, I realise I might be lesbian after hearing the journeys of others who are also in the LGBTQ+ Muslim group. I know — a strange thing to notice later in life but looking back on everything, the lack of desire to be with guys romantically

and the degree of “I’m faking this” that I felt in my one year relationship and in the shorter term ones, makes more sense. Regardless, I am sure that my libido is on the low side but the thought of dating a woman somehow sounds “right” for me. It’s hard to describe.

I talked to my parents about this and they were just as open as they were before. They said I should not rush and take my time finding out what is right for me. They also assured me that they will support me no matter what. Again, I’m immensely grateful for their support and it’s saddens me to learn of other people who can’t be as open with their parents/family. Extended family is a different story but I don’t really care what they think, since my parents and friends are my true community.

Rusty

I was born in South Korea and adopted to the United States at the age of 8 months old. My mother and father were childless before adopting myself and my twin brother. I realised I was gay at the age of eighteen, as a freshman in college. I pretty much accepted it right away, but it was 1978 and there wasn't much information. My father died just before my thirteenth birthday and my mother died when I was twenty-three. I was never able to come out to my mother as she was profoundly ill for several years before her death, so it wasn't possible to have a dialogue about my sexuality.

I didn't experience any teasing or bullying about possible sexual orientation identity in school, but I was teased and taunted for being Asian and not white.

I have chosen not to attempt birth search for a wide variety of reasons and one element is the fact that Korean society remains fairly homophobic. I have no desire to deal with this additional layer in a birth search and family reunion situation. That's not the main reason I've chosen not to search, but it is one element of many.

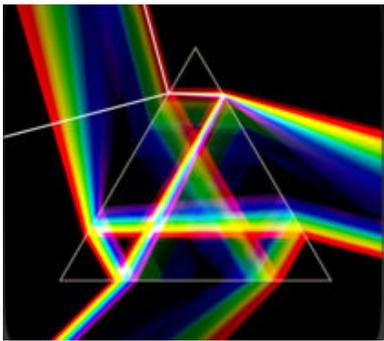
On the three return trips I've had to Korea, I've experienced many alienating situations and I've accepted I will never feel completely at home there. I spend my time educating adoptive parents, hoping they will find a careful balance in how they talk about and approach their child's birth country. I grew up in an era where my adoptive parents had no education and few resources whereas these days, adoptive parents have a plethora of information available to them. It's important adoptive parents don't do either extreme — trash or over idealise a child's birth country. I've met adoptees who return and experience a complete culture shock and struggle to integrate what they thought they knew of Korea versus what it is really like. It's important that adoptee's have realistic expectations and develop a nuanced view, if they choose to undertake a return trip.

Dating and relationships for me is a big subject. In the gay community, just as in the heterosexual community, people of colour experience both racism and racial fetishism. When I began dating as a young adult, as a young gay man, I found it was impossible to escape these issues. The only men who were attracted to me had some level of fetish for Asian men. I was lucky to find a partner who was able to encompass my full humanity. Though he has certain preferences based on race, we are able to form a relationship on our full selves, not in ways that reinforce sexual fetishism or objectification.

I've been with my life-partner for thirty two years now and he is wonderful. He never had the desire to parent children and seventeen years ago, I accepted the offer of an unmarried, heterosexual female friend to co-parent. Things have been complicated by her mental illness which emerged subsequent to the birth of our daughter. But I do have a sixteen year old daughter who lives with her mother. I have a wonderful relationship with

my daughter. We've been extremely fortunate. There are no issues specifically connected with my sexual orientation. I have had to explain gay identity to her, but she has been fine and it is not an issue for her.

I feel my life journey as a gay person has strongly paralleled my journey as a transracial adoptee. In both cases, I've had to create my identity. I worked through a lot of confusion in my younger years and have framed myself in ways to create my own fluid sense of identity. I like to say I have multiple prisms that I look through to understand the world. Sometimes I feel dizzy because I have so many prisms to see through.



One small example of the complex way in which I see the world is this: once, when my daughter was visiting me when she was about 7 years old, we were walking down the street and saw on a bus shelter, an interesting promotional campaign on Dove soap promoting body image acceptance. The poster showed three naked women. My reaction was very complex. I remember looking and thinking as a gay man who is all for naturalism in bodies, then as a person of colour seeing how we frame bodies, and then as a parent of a young child having to explain why this picture was on a bus shelter. I instantly see the various angles from my multiple lenses and it gives me a gift for understanding life from different viewpoints.

I grew up in overwhelming whiteness where I was taught to hate my body and especially my face. Yet ironically my mother would tell me how handsome I was. In a way, her saying this made me feel bad because each time, it reminded me that no-one else said it. I loved her loving ways but growing up, I felt alienated and when I came out as a gay man, I realised I had a lot of internalised messages about myself and my body. Being a transracial adoptee as well as gay, I had so many layers to work through.

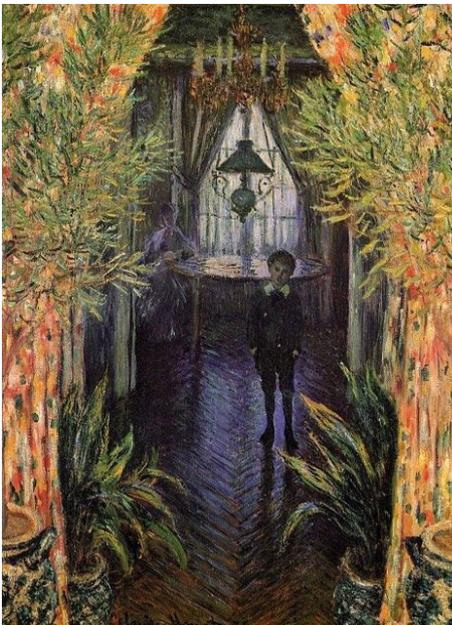
Body and facial self-image is a huge issue for transracial adoptees; it's also a huge issue for LGBTQ+ people. I've spent decades working through my relationship with my face and body, especially face, and have done much healing along the way. I share about my experiences with fellow adult adoptees in order to support them on their journeys. I also share with white parents who adopt children of colour, in order to help them to understand the issues for transracial adoptees. It is important to raise adopted children in social environments in which the daily experience of adoptees, mirrors their own specific race(s), and to see people of all races and colours surrounding them.

As I've matured, I realise these layers are no longer a curse to struggle through. Looking different is a now gift for me. My journey has meant I've learnt so much more compassion and it's why I became a journalist. It's also why I co-founded a support group for transracial adoptees. I wanted to help enable an easier path for younger adoptees.

Sen

I was adopted from South Korea to Australia when I was 4 months old. My first recollection of being same-sex attracted was when I was 5 years old. I developed what I guess you would classify as a “crush” or “special admiration” for a blonde haired woman on a popular Australian soapie. At the time I had no concept of sexuality and did not realise these feelings were considered disparate to the heteronormative expectations that underline and dictate acceptable conduct within mainstream society. It wasn’t until I started school that I began to realise that girls were supposed to be attracted to boys and that to deviate from this would position me on the outer. As an adoptee I already felt quite isolated from my peers and so my need to conform, in an attempt to fit in, was very strong.

Unfortunately my coming out experience is not something I claim ownership of, but was instead forced upon me after my adoptive mother found a letter I had written to a friend confiding in her about my same-sex attraction. This was quite a traumatic experience for me, as not only did I feel as though I was “outed” before I was emotionally ready, my adoptive mother also responded very negatively and harshly. This experience coupled with my existing adoption angst meant that my adolescent years were a very difficult time. Fortunately, my adoptive mother and immediate family members are now accepting of my sexuality and have lovingly embraced my partners (past and present).



My dating life before coming out in high school involved secrecy and anxiety about being found out. After my friends and peers became aware of my sexuality, dating became easier and I did not experience any noticeable barriers. This was most likely helped by the fact that I went to a high school where other students were openly gay and my entire friendship circle was accepting of my sexual orientation. My challenges with dating emerged more so in my early twenties where in hindsight, I felt as though fetishisation and racism became apparent. For example, it was assumed that girls who dated me must have a fetish for Asians, as Asians were generally considered less appealing and attractive. This made me feel as though my race became my defining feature when it came to attracting a potential partner— something my

Caucasian, Australian lesbian friends did not experience.

I think unfortunately for many people of colour, regardless of their sexuality, this is also the case that racism becomes disguised by the misguided notion of “personal preference”.

I'm sure we've all heard the common line, "I'm just not attracted to Asians". In this way, it is somehow socially acceptable to discount a whole race of people and label them as unattractive based on personal preference. Add adoption and same-sex attraction to the mix and you've got someone that intersectional feminists would consider to be pretty high up on the oppression ladder.

To LGBTQ+ adoptees coming out, I believe it is important to seek support from trusted peers, family members or service providers. It can be a very emotional undertaking and invariably there will be some ignorant, fearful homophobe who might not receive the news positively. Also, ensure you are driving the decision and are not being coerced by others. It is important to mention not everyone who is LGBTQ+ decides to "come out". In fact, "coming out" is a very Western concept, where it is important to have our individual identities acknowledged and validated. However, for LGBTQ+ individuals who belong to collective cultures and societies, the identity of the family or community as a whole takes precedence. This considered, many LGBTQ+ individuals in the latter context, decide against "coming out" and prefer the concept of "coming in" – where it becomes implicitly understood that they are same-sex attracted by family and community. This might be achieved by inviting a partner over as a friend for family get-togethers or to community gatherings so that everyone gets to know them and eventually understands the nature of the relationship. This kind of approach does not require a loud and proud coming out, but rather focuses on cultivating relationships between the partner and significant others, without emphasising sexual orientation.



Thankfully, I have not experienced any ongoing bullying as a result of my sexual orientation. Having said this, I continually experience intermittent discrimination in workplaces, while out socialising, etc. This discrimination can be overt, where I am called a "dyke" by a stranger in public; or it can be more covert where my relationship with my significant other is not considered as legitimate as those of my heterosexual work colleagues.

When dealing with discrimination, I have found that a strong support network of friends and family who empathise and advocate is very important. I would also recommend seeking professional support, if and when your mental health becomes affected.

My adoptive mother in particular required time to process and accept my sexual orientation. She transitioned through a process that I would compare to the 5 stages of grief and loss – first there was denial, then there was anger, bargaining, depression and finally acceptance. In her defence, I understand some of her resistant emotions stemmed from concerns that life would be much harder for me, which in turn had been shaped by

the broader homophobic society we live in. The most difficult aspect of this journey was feeling cast out and abandoned by my adoptive mother. We had previously shared a very close and loving relationship, which I can now see was largely driven by my need to please her. And of course, this need to please stemmed from my deep seeded fear of rejection – following on from my relinquishment. I felt that as soon as I stopped trying to be the person my mother wanted me to be, I was no longer loveable. Thankfully, we have moved on from this stage of life and have been able to re-establish our relationship, but this has not been without hardship.

I have previously searched for and located my birth family. We maintain a relationship at present, but this is made difficult by distance, language barriers and my previous desire to keep my sexual orientation private. A couple of years ago, I took my partner to meet my family and we both stayed with them. I introduced my partner as a “friend” to avoid any untoward reactions – I could not contemplate a second rejection at this point in time. I wanted to give my family the opportunity to get to know my partner before I eventually decided to tell them about the true nature of our relationship. Fast forward to the present day, and I have carefully crafted a letter to my family, which discloses my same-sex relationship. I intend on sending this within the next couple of months. What has compelled me to do this is the recent addition to our family – our beautiful son. I would like him to be able to have a relationship with his Korean grandparents and to not feel as though the make-up of his family needs to be shrouded in secrecy.

My partner is the birth mother of our son. We sought the services of a fertility clinic and used a Korean sperm donor. My lived experience of adoption has made me aware of the importance of embracing a child’s heritage and beginnings. Because of this, I have made a commitment to my child, in acknowledging and honouring his biological father; supporting him in undertaking searching and establishing a relationship – if and when he decides to do so, and if this is possible – and maintaining a connection to his Korean culture.

Sora

Born in China, I was adopted into a US family at 6 months old. My adoptive family consisted of my father, mother, and myself. They are both Caucasian and they adopted me whilst in their thirties. My parents do not identify with a certain religion but read about many different religions and take aspects into account when creating their own spirituality. I myself also do not identify with a certain religion and would probably answer with agnostic atheist if anyone asked me.

At age sixteen, in the second half of my sophomore year of high school, I started questioning my sexual orientation and gender identity as I gained interest in an openly gay girl at my school. I was pretty confused at first because I never had interest in the same sex before; it was new, strange and completely unexpected. There were no signs in my childhood that would foreshadow homosexual feelings in the future. I dealt with this by finding and joining an LGBTQ+ forum site, sharing my experiences, and asking questions, in search of a definitive answer of whether I was attracted to the same sex or not.



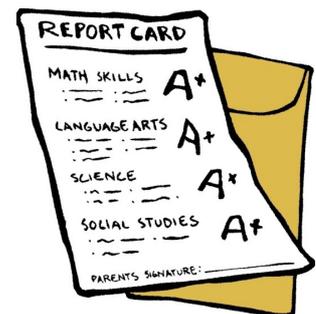
Along with this search came the gender identity search. This was definitely more complex a part of my LGBTQ+ questioning. It was unclear whether I had felt the need to identify as a different gender due to a strict childhood of femininity, pushed onto me by my mother. She had forced me to wear extremely garish feminine clothing that I hated until around middle school. She also insisted on doing my hair every morning, painfully, in a feminine hairstyle for a good amount of time in elementary school. I had also lived in the shadow of my best friend, attractive with long blond hair, a thin nose, extremely pale skin, and an overall pretty appearance that outshined my long and thick black hair, plain brown eyes, wide and flat nose, and average body. This was a factor that also made me think maybe the gender identity issue wasn't real, maybe it was just a beauty insecurity that went extreme and manifested into thinking I was the opposite gender. Additionally, I felt the psychology behind my adoptee status could discredit my transgender questions, because China discards females and keeps males in the era of the one-child policy.

I came out to my parents the fall of junior year of high school. They had noticed a few changes over the summer between the start of my questioning and coming out. I had stopped shaving my legs and getting my eyebrows and lip waxed, which were stereotypically female routines in the United States that I used to do in freshman and sophomore year. The way I came out was through a letter: the letter was long, messy, and focused mostly on gender identity with a side note on sexuality. I knew they would be fine with my bisexuality. It was the gender identity I was more uncertain about, more absorbed in, and my parents worried about/didn't understand. My mom cried when she

read the letter because she was dismayed to see me going through so much internal conflict and confusion. She was also very indignant and vocal about this in relation to my gender identity and the declaration that I wanted to try identifying as more masculine, or subtly, as a boy. This led to a lot of tension and arguments and the most hostility I ever felt from my mom.

My adoptive family have calmed down since I have started to identify as genderqueer or androgynous. They were most indignant when I rejected femininity completely and wanted to be known as male. The most difficult aspect probably was in trying to make them understand the whole concept of being transgender. Uneducated, they tried to understand but they couldn't grasp how I was feeling and thought I had no basis for feeling the way I did. They deny I was ever transgender. Being bisexual never comes up in conversation with them but they know I am because of the letter I wrote and I think they are fine with that.

Luckily, I was never bullied before I started questioning, nor after. Bullying was kind of "under-the-radar" at my high school, due to its small population of 200 students. In such a small setting, where I grew up with the same kids from kindergarten to high school graduation, everyone knew everyone. I was known as the angelic straight-A Asian student with a nice family and home life. I was also the "boring and perfect kid." I was always shy and quiet in my elementary years and only talked to my close friends. Due to this, I never got involved with other kids during elementary school. Towards the end of sixth grade, I started becoming social with more than just my two best friends. But since I was always uninvolved with everyone and their drama, everyone treated me nicely because I had never done anything bad to them.



Light teasing was a different story. I know I was gossiped about when I started to show signs of masculinity i.e., unshaved legs, thicker eyebrows, etc. I had also tried to deepen my voice. People thought I was showing traits of a lesbian and they were only half wrong. By this time, I had already figured out I was bisexual. Although I had never gone very far with a girl, I could easily recognise my attraction and lust for them. It felt like I got teased about my leg hair on my cross country and track team constantly. Two of my teammates, who I was otherwise very friendly with, asked me (while laughing) at a track meet if I was going to use my leg hair to make a braid. I know they were just a bit ignorant and didn't really mean anything bad by it, but due to their prior teasing that year, it pushed my feelings a little too far and I was irritated for the rest of the meet.

As far as teasing because of my race, there was a lot more of this than LGBTQ+ related teasing. My school, being small in a dead fishing town on the coast of Washington, was and still is full of country folk who never leave the town in their lives. There are many close-minded, ignorant, racist and homophobic people living in my hometown therefore, I received many jabs about my race while I lived there. In a school of less than two hundred

students, I was the only ethnic Chinese person and there were only two other ethnically Asian people in the school (one Korean with Korean birth parents and the other, a Russian with Caucasian adoptive parents). There were a couple of other Asians in the school but they were born in the United States. Ethnically they were half Asian, half Caucasian.

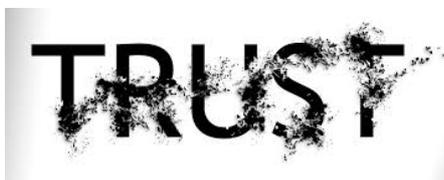
People often joked with me mimicking squinty eyes, replacing l's with r's, telling racist Asian jokes, or asking me questions based off stereotypes about Chinese or other Asian people. I think I was okay with this and ultimately started joking the same way in return because I knew they were just ignorant and didn't mean to really offend or hurt me. Due to many years of this, I became desensitised to the racism and eventually became racist myself.

I don't have much to offer as advice on coping with serious bullying since I was never a victim of it. Nor do I offer any for teasing. I don't think my coping techniques were very "healthy" or right.

Being LGBTQ+ has not significantly affected me in who I choose to date. I have been dating my first and only boyfriend for more than two years now. At the time we started dating, I wanted to make clear to him what I was going through in terms of identifying my gender. I wanted someone I could confide in and he had already told me he was bisexual, so I assumed he was an LGBTQ+ ally. I also didn't want to start the relationship with him thinking I was something I wasn't and then have an unexpected shock later in the relationship. I wanted to be treated as a male. Telling him early in the relationship ensured I could be honest and clear about my hopes for the relationship right away.

Our discussion went fairly well and he didn't get disgusted or see me as any different. I could tell he didn't really understand the whole concept since he was also from my close-minded school and had received no education on the matter. I didn't blame him. I understood it was the environment in which we were raised and I was just grateful that he didn't judge me for my feelings.

Later on in the relationship, being bisexual came into play in a long story about explaining my feelings for females to him and wanting to come up with a solution to experiment, while still remaining faithful. This was a big part of the trust in our relationship. I told him I wanted to experiment with women but had restrained myself due to the agreements in our relationship, and this was now suffocating me.



Race has played somewhat of a role in our relationship, but had nothing to do with our attraction to each other. While I am almost fully Chinese, raised by Caucasian parents, he is part Cambodian (father's side) and part Caucasian (mother's side). He has lived with his completely Caucasian side of the family with a step-father, mother, and two half siblings most of his life. He looks very similar to his mother but has no blood relations to

his step-father and only half blood relation to his siblings. They are both much younger than him in age, separating them even further. In this way, we can both relate to not looking like one or both of our parents, and also looking Asian.

I had interest only for Caucasian males growing up, since that was the only race around me. But now, at this point in my life I could never see myself dating a Caucasian male. The possibility just seems strange when I picture it. I believe it has something to do with my self-image because I see myself as Asian when I look in the mirror. I also feel it is an awkward match if I were to date an Asian guy because I am American on the inside, in my culture and thinking. My boyfriend being of mixed race confuses me sometimes and it's strange to consider him as either white or Asian. This confusion conversely also seems to comfort me because I do not have to be reminded of one specific race when I see him.

To adoptees who are just coming out: no matter what you identify as, don't try and change your image based off heteronormative, cisgender values. For example, don't keep long hair just because it's a stereotype. Show yourself how you want to be shown, even if it means taking longer to find a partner. At least this way, you will be with someone who is attracted to your true appearance and not just a standard. Also, telling my boyfriend about my LGBTQ+ issues at the beginning worked well for me, but it may not for others. My boyfriend and I were friends for four years before I asked him out, so I knew him well and correctly predicted his reactions to my coming out. Even if you need time to gauge a reaction to coming out, I wouldn't leave it too long into the relationship. If you do, the other person may feel like you have been dishonest and unfortunately may change their mind about dating you.

I have not searched for or found my biological family. I wish to someday when I become fluent in Mandarin and when I have saved up enough money to be able to stay in China for a while. The only way I would feel being LGBTQ+ complicates things is that my appearance is not that of a stereotypical Chinese girl. If I ever put posters or pictures of myself out there, I don't know if they would see me correctly because my hair is so short and I may look boyish to them.

I currently have a boyfriend and we have no plans to start a family within the next five years. We are both still in college and we desire stable jobs, marriage, and our own place before we consider children. He wants a child in the future and I do too, but I am more conflicted than he is. Being androgynous/genderqueer, I often think about how uncomfortable it would be to label myself as a mother or be called "Mom." This is a minor discomfort I feel I could easily get over. The bigger obstacle for me is mainly about childbirth.

As an adoptee who has no knowledge of blood relations, I desperately want to have a child who has my DNA. I desire to know someone who is blood related to me but the prospect of becoming pregnant and giving birth does not sit well for multiple reasons. Being LGBTQ+ plays a small role in it, but like I mentioned earlier with labelling myself

as a mother. I think being LGBTQ+ is the least of my issues when it comes to pregnancy and childbirth and is something I could ignore or push away, while the other issues aren't as easy to avoid.

This internal conflict of whether to have a child through pregnancy and childbirth, or to adopt a child as I was adopted, will probably continue to be unresolved, at least until I am in my mid-twenties. Even then, I will still probably be unsure of what to do. I'm hoping as time goes on, the answer will come to me naturally and I will accept what I want to do.

Vin

I was born in India in 1986 and at 10 days old I was given to an orphanage in the city of Patna, where I remained for the first 10 months of my life. I was adopted into an Australian family and arrived in Melbourne, Australia in September 1987. I was flown across with 7 other children from all parts of India. Our group was the largest to be arrive in Australia at the same time.

Within my new family, I had 1 brother and 2 older sisters. I was the youngest. My parents were in their mid twenties when I arrived and my family life was great growing up in Australia. I spent my childhood playing outside with my brother, sisters and other kids from the street we lived on. My childhood felt like the TV series “The Wonder Years” where everyone from our street got along really well. We played cricket and football at the park and we would know it was time to go home when the street lights came on. We also went to the local swimming pool in summer. It was the place to go in summer!



It was a small town when I was a kid. Now it's massive. I grew up in a Catholic family. We weren't dedicated to the church but we did go for Christmas, baptisms, holy communion or confirmation. We are one of those families that always sits at the table as a family to eat and we talk about our day and what we get up to. Mum and dad were quite traditional so we celebrated every occasion and always did things as a family. We went on a lot of camping trips around outback Australia.

I was one of the lucky ones because I got a family who was always supportive. They try to understand when we are confronted with a challenge. The approach in my family is to overcome challenges as a family. We are very close and have always been this way. We are strong and grounded people. We speak our truths about our own opinions and we were always taught to stand up for what we believed in and never let a shark try to eat us. Stand strong and fight your battles head on. Face your fears and always be respectful of everyone. These are the values I've been raised in by my family.

When I went to high school, my life changed forever. I was constantly bullied. It was funny because I went to an all-boys school and 90% of the school was multi-coloured. It was like “spot the Aussie”. I didn't feel I fitted in with Indians because I viewed myself as Australian. Most of the Indians would call me “curry muncher” which is humorous

because I hate curry and don't even like the smell! Whenever mum cooks curry, she would also cook a plate of pasta because I won't eat curry.

Year 7 was the begging of the end for me. It started off just having boys call me *gay* and *faggot* but I didn't even know what those terms meant at the time. I quickly learned the definition of the word *gay* when a boy from my year forced me to go down on him in the boys toilet. He said it was to prove I was *gay* like they said. That was the first time he sexually abused me. He threatened to kill me if I told anyone, so I remained silent. I didn't tell anyone what he was doing to me and he continued to sexually abuse me throughout my time at high school.

By the second term of year 7, things escalated and he raped me. He then repeatedly raped me for two and a half years while I attended this school. I got bashed on a weekly basis by groups of boys calling me *gay* and *faggot*. They said horrible things like, "We know why your family gave you up in India, they wouldn't want a *faggot* like you as their son!" They said horrible things to me everyday in relation to being adopted.



They continued calling me names and bashed me with metal bars, throwing sticks and anything they could find to hurt me. In year 8, I was brutally gang raped by 4 boys during school camp. I felt lifeless and soulless the whole time. I was already shattered but this event took every last piece of any soul I had left. One of the other boys found me in the morning wrapped in a sheet covered in blood and they ran and got the teacher. I told him what had happened when he asked and he told me to stop making up stories. I asked if I could go home and he told me to stop being a baby and that I couldn't go home. Most of the teachers knew what was going on but chose to ignore it. They documented what was going on in my school file and this was not the first time I had told them. Half way through year 9, the school called mum, dad and I into the office and told us, "In the school's best interest, you should leave". The reason given was, "We cannot control the bullies and it is easier to remove you, then them".

While I was at that school it confused me why the Indians would tease me given I was the same colour as them. I was even from the same country as them but I had a white family.

My family knew about the bullying but they didn't know about the sexual abuse and rapes until I was in my twenties. Being a thirteen year old kid, I was terrified of the bullies who threatened to kill me, so I never spoke up about the sexual abuse and rapes. After school most days I would come home and go straight to my room and think of ways to kill myself. I always hid my feelings and became very good at this.

My parents were at the school almost weekly as I constantly had new bruises and they wanted to find out what was going and why the school wasn't doing anything to protect me. The school denied the bullying. They would say, "Boys are just being boys!" Nothing was done about it. The bullying I experienced was not normal bullying. I had boys push me onto the road in front of cars, onto train tracks, they even held my head under water and tried to drown me at school swimming days and they even hung me by a noose on year 7 camp. The list goes on and its horrible what they did to me.

I left the school and life went on with so many problems as I was now suicidal all the time and having post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). I was depressed and didn't want to live anymore. I had flashbacks and nightmares and I could barley go out of the house. I started a TAFE course to try and finish schooling. I became popular for the first time in my life and ran away from home because I fell in love with a girl and wanted a life without rules. I lived away from home for almost 2 years.

As time went on I had a few girlfriends but always felt like something inside of me wasn't right. I started noticing boys in a different way and I felt angry at myself for thinking this way after all I'd been through. I hated myself and felt ashamed. I was angry at the world and myself, but I couldn't fight the feelings.

I was seventeen years old when I told mum I might be gay and she was relieved. Apparently, everyone else knew and I didn't. My family supported me. They didn't care that I was gay. They just cared that I was happy and true to myself.



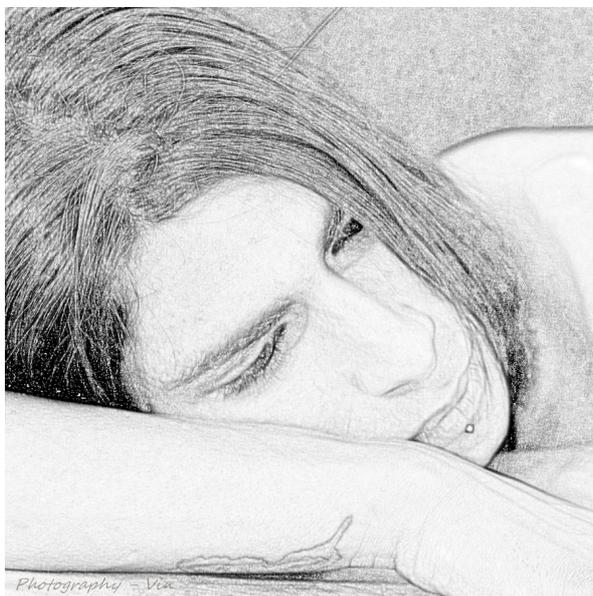
Between the ages of eighteen to twenty years old, I spent every weekend at gay clubs. It was the same crowd every weekend so I always felt safe knowing people there. I hung around the drag queens at first and eventually I became one for a little bit. The drag scene is very bitchy, but I think that is the whole point. I loved being a drag queen! You can say and do whatever you want because when you wipe away the makeup you become yourself again. When I wasn't in drag, I was this unconfident, scared boy inside who rarely spoke and didn't have the guts or courage to say anything to anyone. Yet as a drag queen, I was invincible when I had my heels on!

When I got out the drag scene I was this person who had experienced what it was like to be outgoing and not have the mask on. I now had to try and figure out how to be like that all the time, myself without the mask. I got beaten up a lot for being gay because people didn't like the way I looked. I got so use to being bashed and called faggot it almost became normal to me.

The town I grew up in were full of people who didn't like you if you stood out or were different. I'm sure it was like that in every town in Australia. I always avoided the food courts at the local shopping centres because the cool kids would hang out there in their groups. They would yell to me in front of everyone and call me names. No-one stood up for me, they all just looked and kept walking.

These days if people did that they would be named and shamed on social media. Being gay now is so much easier than it was when I was growing up. There is still a lot of stigma towards being gay but it is more accepted now. People are always afraid of what they don't know, instead of educating themselves about the things they fear.

In dating, it was almost impossible for me because I am Indian. Even other Indians didn't like me. People would always point out my differences such as my skin colour, long hair or because I didn't go to the gym. I wasn't the Aussie with blonde hair or blue eyes. I'm the type of guy who orders a burger from McDonalds and parks outside a gym to eat it. I hate gyms. I don't care for looks all that much to be honest. I have to be attracted to the person, of course but if they have an ugly personality, for me it makes them unattractive as a whole. This is just my opinion and I never had much luck on the dating scene when I was in it. I have found someone who accepts me for who I am and that's all that matters to me. The dating world was horrible. In my experience, I found people to be judgemental and horrible.



I've tried connecting to people online as a way to make friends but I get the impression they don't want to know you. They either want something from me or they don't talk to me. Unfortunately that is my experience of trying online to make friends in the gay world. It's the survival of the fittest and if you can't hack it, then you become isolated and have few friends like me.

I don't have many gay friends because I'm different or they aren't attracted to me. I've found if they aren't attracted to me, they won't even be friends. It all sounds very narrow minded and harsh, but please feel free

to walk a few miles in my shoes and you'll see why I say this. There are nice genuine people out there, I'm sure but there are too many judgemental ones who only seem to care about what they look like. Sadly, this happens a lot in life. One doesn't have to be gay to find this out.

I believe if you're not gay you won't know what we go through. Same with being adopted, straight or of a different race. Unless you are one, you can never fully understand how it actually feels. You might be able to relate or have similar experiences but you will never fully understand.

There are some many things I have had to deal with in my life and it has never been easy. I suffer from panic attacks, depression and live with PTSD. It has taken me a long time to deal with my issues. I still live with these problems in everyday life and it can be a struggle. I got through with the support of my family and close friends. Life can be hard and unbearable at times but when I talk to others and share my experiences, I feel less alone. There is help available, so if you ever feel alone or need someone to talk to, there are many organisations dedicated to helping people cope with depression, anxiety, PTSD and any other form of struggle in life.



Its been a year since I started searching for my birth family. What really helped and inspired me to look for them was the movie "Lion". The film is about the Australian-Indian boy Saroo, adopted from India to Australia and many years later found his birth family using Google Earth. It was so inspiring because Saroo and I came from India together on the same flight to Australia. He was 1 of the 7 children I mentioned earlier.

Searching so far has been a roller coaster ride of emotions but I don't want to give myself false hope thinking everything is going to be a fairy tale if I find them. I have to keep it real and tell myself that sometimes things don't always work out the way I want, but that's okay because that's life.

Life doesn't always end up the way we want. When I took the school and the bullies to court, things didn't turn out the way I thought. Being so long ago, everyone who witnessed some of the events, decided either not to remember, or get involved. Years of evidence that had been in my files at the school must have been shredded. When my lawyer got the remaining files we realised the school had gotten rid of any bit of evidence and gave only school reports for the years I had been there.

Every incident that had been recorded had been removed and destroyed. A month before my court date, the main bully tracked me down and raped me again and told me, "This is what you get for going to the police!" What he did before the court case had nothing to do

with the case at high school so I couldn't mention it. We proved the school failed in their duty of care but we couldn't prove the rapes and my lawyer decided not to pursue taking action against the school because we would have been the first family to go up against the Catholic education system. My lawyer didn't want to do that. So that was the end of that.

The school got away with everything and the boys got away with everything. So no justice at all for me!

This is my opinion of my experiences and in no way, shape or form have I, or do I speak for anyone except myself with everything I have written. This is a cruel world and I was born to stand out, not fit in.